

CLAIMING A SEAT AT THE TABLE IN DEFENSE OF
DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION: CONSTRUCTING COMMON GROUND
THROUGH COMMUNITY AND REFLECTION

A Dissertation

by

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Submitted to the Graduate School
at Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2017
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Reich College of Education

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Abstract

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This qualitative research study was timed to begin with the implementation of a developmental education policy, the Multiple Measures for Placement Policy, that directly impacted community colleges in North Carolina in the Fall of 2016. Despite a multitude of mandatory obligations at Mountain Community College, participants in the research study formed a community of interaction, founded on social constructionism's tenets of educational inquiry, to examine current misperceptions related to students enrolled in or bypassing developmental education. Through a series of four professional development sessions focused on reflective inquiry, and by way of insider action research, members of the community discovered that their differences dissolved in light of common challenges. They shared and employed best practices, extended their conceptions of students and community, felt emboldened to speak up, and created a metacognitive ripple effect that positively influenced the campus-at-large.

Dedication

With deepest thanks to my sweet, supportive family, Mark, Cole, and Harper, and to colleagues at MCC for their enthusiasm, encouragement, participation, patience, and trust.

Dedicated to the passionate, compassionate educators I've met along the way:

Fae Porisch and Kathy Porisch Monson,
my very first teachers,
for a life-long love of learning;

Mr. Zellmann,
for valorizing writing and spotting something in mine
(thanks also for *To Kill a Mockingbird*);

Professor Gremmels,
for authenticity and passion for the profession
(we read Poe on Halloween just for you);

Dr. Vachel Miller,
for compassionate, contemplative teaching
(thanks also for the introduction to Parker Palmer);

Dr. Alecia Jackson,
for the fire & the fury
and for always pushing students to be their best;

Dr. Nita Matzen,
for teaching me how to teach
and for always saying "yes" the third time I asked;

Dr. Krista Terry,
for your support, sense of humor, and unwavering
belief that I would actually reach completion.

Thank You

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Theoretical Framework	3
Problem Statement	9
Purpose of the Study	11
Research Questions	12
Research Approach	12
Study Setting	13
The Researcher	14
Assumptions	16
Significance of the Study	17
Organization of the Dissertation	19
Chapter 2: Literature Review	21
Key Terms & Definitions	21
Community of Interaction	21
Developmental Education (DE)	22
Myth-perceptions	22
Social Constructionism	23

The Impact of Policy: Past to Present	23
History of Developmental Education.....	26
Contemporary DE Issues: Cost, Assessment, Completion Rates	29
Cost	29
Assessment.....	31
Completion Rates.....	34
DE Student Characteristics	36
DE Educators	39
Addressing the Gap.....	41
At the Axis of Theory and Practice.....	42
Key Assumptions of Social Constructionism	44
Knowledge in a Shared Reality.....	44
Constructing Knowledge Through Language	45
Regarding Ontology.....	47
Creating and Sustaining Values	48
Constructionism and Constructivism	50
A Framework for Research.....	52
Relationships.....	53
Dialogue and the Construction of Knowledge.....	53
Putting Relationships and Dialogue into Practice.....	54
Conversation Leads to Collaboration.....	56
Collaboration Prompts Action	57
Collaboration and Action Lead to Practice	58

Chapter 3: Methodology	60
A Qualitative Approach	61
Action Research	61
Action Research as Advocacy	63
Insider Action Research	65
The Research Process	67
Locating the Site and Participants	68
Implementing the Research	70
Reflective Inquiry	71
Collecting Data	73
Writing the Data	74
Interpreting the Data	75
Maintaining Integrity	77
Quality and Trustworthiness	79
Reflexivity	80
Design Rationale	82
Chapter 4: Findings	84
Preface to the Profile	85
August – October 2016	85
The Process Profile	88
Overview	88
Initial Course Corrections	95
Common Challenges	96

Conceptualizing Community	102
Collective Actions	105
Five Findings	107
A Comprehensive Vision.....	110
Profile Postscript.....	111
December 2016 – January 2017	111
Fitting the Findings into the Framework	112
Proliferating Myth-Perceptions.....	116
Chapter 5: Conclusions	119
Research Question #1	120
Research Question #2	122
Implications.....	126
Criticism.....	128
Pausing for Reflection.....	129
Conclusions.....	131
Recommendations	135
References.....	137
Appendix A: Session Design	150
Appendix B: Invitation to Participate	156
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form	158
Appendix D: Observation Guide	160
Appendix E: Post- and Pre-Session Survey Questions	161
Vita.....	162

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

By now, you've probably heard about Simon Newman, the president of Mount Saint Mary's University, and his statements about the need to throw out high-risk students in order to improve his school's retention numbers. He memorably goaded reluctant employees with "You just have to drown the bunnies...Put a Glock to their heads." ...The founding assumption of community colleges as a sector is that the epistemology behind exclusion is false. We don't know who will succeed until they have a chance. Ability sometimes wears disguises. The way community colleges discern ability is by letting people in and giving them a chance to show what they can do.
– excerpt from "Save the Bunnies!" blog post by Anonymous (2016)

During a professional development day in mid-October 2015 at a local community college, fellow Developmental Reading and English colleagues and I were invited to speak with the curriculum English department on campus about upcoming changes affecting our corresponding departments. With the mandatory implementation of the *Multiple Measures for Placement Policy* (Multiple Measures) in North Carolina in the Fall of 2016, both the curriculum math and English departments at Mountain Community College (MCC)¹ were anticipating increased numbers of students deemed underprepared, as the North Carolina State Legislature's requirements for what defines a student as "college ready" had changed. In the recent past, underprepared students had begun their studies at MCC in the department of Developmental Studies, where they could revisit foundational mathematical, grammatical, and writing concepts prior to stepping into curriculum math and English courses. According to the new Multiple Measures policy, however, students were "college ready" if they had graduated from high school within the last five years, taken four English and math courses during high school, and maintained a GPA that was equal to or greater than 2.6 (State Board of Community Colleges, 2015, p. 2). Consequently, due to data gathered from the staggered

¹ In consideration of Seidman's (2006) work related to informed consent, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the school and all study participants.

roll-out of Multiple Measures across the state, MCC's Developmental Studies program was anticipating an approximate 20% decrease in the number of students enrolled in developmental courses in the Fall of 2016. In other words, of the roughly 1000 students enrolled in developmental math and/or developmental English and seen in the fall semester alone (MCC Dean of Academic Success, personal communication, February 1, 2016), this policy would directly impact at least 200 or more students on campus. The purpose of the mid-October meeting, then, according to the individual who was chair of the Developmental Studies program at that time, was to alleviate the fears of the curriculum English instructors on campus who anticipated teaching a significant proportion of students in coming semesters who would have previously tested into Developmental Studies (Former MCC Developmental Studies Chair, personal communication, October 12, 2015).

This bears repeating: These curriculum English instructors *were scared of the students we teach in developmental education*. The mid-October meeting involved a lot of head nodding and some question-asking from the English department and a discussion of best practices from our developmental point of view. I left the meeting with my own new fears, feeling like our words had just fallen on deaf ears and fretting that there was no safety net in place to catch these students facing off against the bulwark of a fear of change steeped in "the way it's always been taught." A colleague, discussing a proposed pass/repeat supplemental course (ENG 111A) which would be mandatory for students entering MCC with a 2.6 – 3.0 GPA and would be taught in conjunction with the first course on the English curriculum docket (ENG 111: Writing and Inquiry), commented as we walked back to our offices, "I really think *we* need to be the ones teaching that class, don't you?" (MCC Developmental Studies instructor, personal communication, October 13, 2015). I heartily

agreed...and yet, the misconceptions that perpetuated this fear of students worried me, and left me pondering what I could do to positively affect a significant change that was headed our way.

The key word, of course, is *do*. I have no patience for standing on the sidelines, and setting students up for failure is the last objective I'd ever have on my list as an instructor, right behind *lecture for an entire 50-minute class period or pre-determine the academic fate of students based on appearance, behavior, or lack of familiarity with the so-called canon of literature*. Beyond my personal feelings, however, here's the crux of the matter: What happens when students are discounted (or perceived as beneath the bounds of curricular instruction) *before they've even begun*? Because the Multiple Measures policy had not yet been enacted at MCC when this study was proposed, the initial difficulty appeared to stem from curriculum instructors' *current* perceptions of the students we have typically seen in developmental education. The practical goal of this study, then, which was timed to begin with the implementation of Multiple Measures at MCC in the Fall of 2016, was to gather together with fellow instructors from both the Academic Success and Arts & Sciences divisions to explore these preliminarily-constructed misconceptions regarding students enrolled in or bypassing developmental education and then use this collective understanding of students to inform our instructional approaches and choices to better serve all students on campus.

Theoretical Framework

As it happens, this fear of developmental education is not only common on college campuses, but pervasive in policies regarding developmental education, too. How does one begin to tackle such systemic misinformation? The first step along the path to probing these

misperceptions is social constructionism, which, as Gergen (2015) noted, is the epistemology that “what we take to be the truth about the world importantly depends on the social relationships of which we are a part” (p. 3). Both nationwide and at home, on our own college campuses, social constructionism prompts a closer inspection of our shared assumptions regarding students and developmental education. What happens, for instance, when an instructor relies on a dominant impression to predetermine their interactions with a supposed “type” of student? Because the content of one’s character is formed through the society within which it interacts, and because our conceptions of one another come from our social acts, too, it is crucial that we begin the conversation now, sharing our understandings of and perspectives toward others. Herein lies the pliability of social constructionism: not only does it allow us to concentrate on myths that have been constructed (context), but it also serves as an avenue for proliferating perspectives related to these constructions (providing new viewpoints that can shift our understanding of the context). The goal, after all, is not to castigate those holding such rigid beliefs, but rather to assess and present multiple alternatives that challenge initial assumptions.

Fittingly, the origins of social constructionism have been probed over the years, too. Berger and Luckmann (1966), founding fathers of social constructionism, credited German philosopher Max Scheler with introducing the term “sociology of knowledge” in the early 1920s (p. 4). Using the term to address “the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 4), Scheler’s intention was to use this concept to analyze the ways that human knowledge was ordered. Scheler’s critics, however, focused on the term’s lack of specificity and questioned the bounds of the discipline itself. Intent on applying the sociology of knowledge for practical, rather than

purely theoretical purposes, Berger and Luckmann (1966) alternately proposed “that the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for ‘knowledge’ in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such ‘knowledge’” (p. 3). They continued, “The sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people ‘know’ as ‘reality’ in their everyday non- or pre-theoretical lives” (p. 15). In this manner, Berger and Luckmann advocated for a “commonsense knowledge” (a term they gleaned from philosopher and sociologist Alfred Schutz) that pushed past the constraints of the theoretical (p. 15). Importantly, Berger and Luckmann’s approach to social constructionism grounded it in our day-to-day interactions.

Historically, glimmers of social constructionism are rooted much farther back than the 1920s. They begin with the questioning of character. In fact, Koch (2005) referenced Plato when he wrote, “The content of the human character has been the starting point for the accumulation of knowledge about social and political practices since the beginnings of systematic inquiry” (p. 1). Gergen (2015), on the other hand, called upon Galileo, heralding him the “hero of the Enlightenment story” and crediting the Enlightenment for “fortify[ing] a conception of society as constituted by individuals” (p. 13). Toward the end of the Enlightenment, Kant proposed that “one cannot make one’s way in society without a conception of what one ‘ought’ to do” (as cited in Gergen, 1994, p. 9). Here we see that character was directly influenced by society. Moving forward, we encounter Marx, who built on Kant’s thinking, and whose own work, according to Koch (2005) “represents a critical breakthrough in social theory” (p. 107). He elaborated, “[Marx] creates a general outline for the understanding of subjectivity, political foundations, and the exercise of power within a framework in which *context*, [emphasis added] rather than the transcendental subject, plays

the determining role” (p. 107). Instead of perceiving the formation of character as an individual act, Marx realized that our awareness of self is constituted *within* and *because* of the very society surrounding it, which, by extension, limits and extends its development. As Marx and Engels (1939) mentioned, “Consciousness is therefore from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist” (p. 19). Therefore, Berger and Luckmann (1966) stipulated, “It is from Marx that the sociology of knowledge derived its root proposition – that man’s consciousness is determined by his social being” (p. 6). Seen in this way, our entire identity, and our knowledge of reality, revolves around our social acts and is highly influenced by those we interact with.

This understanding of consciousness goes hand in hand with a second Marxist idea: ideology. Gergen (2015) defined ideology as “implicit ideas of what the political and social order should look like” (p. 15); Berger and Luckmann (1966) referred parenthetically to it as “ideas serving as weapons for social interests” (p. 6). For better or worse, because our identity is formed through social acts, society correspondingly has the ability to place limitations or blinders on the ways we are viewed and the ways we view ourselves. Berger and Luckmann (1966) credited Mannheim, in particular, for extending Marx’s concept of ideology as ideas of the ruling class. Mannheim (1936) himself wrote, “Nothing is simpler than to maintain that a certain type of thinking is Feudal, bourgeois or proletarian, liberal, socialistic or conservative, as long as there is no analytical method for demonstrating it” (p. 45). Consider this, though: does the ruling class always (or ever) have our best interests in mind? As Mannheim noted, this concept of ideology “reflects the one discovery which emerged from political conflict, namely, that ruling groups in their thinking can become so intensely interest-bound to a situation that they are simply no longer able to see certain facts

which would undermine their sense of domination” (1936, p. 36). Rarely, it seems, does a society think to question its own dominant impressions, preferring instead to cling to traditional notions, or “the way it’s always been done.” Mannheim (1936) stated, “Antiquated and inapplicable norms, modes of thought, and theories are likely to degenerate into ideologies whose function it is to conceal the actual meaning of conduct rather than reveal it” (p. 85). Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the ruling class and those in power (and this can extend to anyone exerting power over another) always, or ever, have our best interests in mind. In fact, ideology not only hinders the very ability to see or consider counter-concepts, but goes a step further by perpetuating stereotypical views of the world, too. Koch (2005) referred to this “conceptual ordering of the world” as a myth (p. 129), and myths bring us right back to where we started, with misperceptions.

The greatest dangers with myth-perceptions are their shaky foundations and their sheer pervasiveness. For example, take a hypothetical instructor’s dominant negative view regarding students taking or bypassing developmental education coursework: if this view is shared with department colleagues and used to cultivate both fear of and distrust in students, is inherent in instructional practices and choices made within the classroom, is perceived by the students themselves, and is further reinforced in conversations with faculty, staff, and administration, this potent, flawed impression has the potential to spread wildly throughout the campus. Further exacerbating the matter is the fact that these myth-perceptions are rarely limited to a single department or campus, and are even, at times, as we shall soon see, fortified by the implementation of haphazard and reactionary state policies.

With these ramifications in mind, it is *crucial* that our initial footsteps along the path are undertaken with a willingness to understand where we are each coming from; we must

gather a multiplicity of perspectives. As Gergen (2015) wrote, “Constructionism invites a certain humility about one’s assumptions and ways of life, fosters curiosity about others’ perspectives and values, and opens the way to replacing the contentious battles over who is right with the mutual probing for possibilities” (p. 27). Our conceptualizations, or basic understandings, of ourselves and our reality are constructed by our connections to each other, and these interactions inform what we know, what we value, and what we do on a daily basis.

For Berger and Luckmann, it was necessary to apply social construction to the arena of the everyday. Because social constructionism is the analysis of knowledge that guides conduct in our everyday life, we assume that our reality *is* reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 21). As such, Berger and Luckmann (1966) posited these two principles:

- *Our reality of everyday life is shared* with others -- our “here and now” realities “continuously impinge on each other” (p. 29).
- We share this reality through *language*, which *constructs our knowledge* (as the authors point out, “men must talk about themselves until they know themselves” (p. 39).

Therefore, drawing from the dynamism of our everyday interactions, the role of community takes center stage. According to Wenger (2010), a community of practice is a “social learning system” (p. 1) where members are engaged in and experience is shaped through social participation. Wilson and Ryder (1996) defined a dynamic learning community as “characterized by distributed control, commitment to generation and sharing of new knowledge, flexible and negotiated learning activities, autonomous community members, high levels of interaction, and a shared goal or project” (p. 799) and noted that in dynamic

communities, “everyone learns” (p. 801). Palmer (1993a) also touched on this type of participation and learning when he wrote:

But scholars now understand that knowing is a profoundly communal act. Nothing could possibly be known by the solitary self, since the self is inherently communal in nature. In order to know something, we depend on the consensus of the community in which we are rooted – a consensus so deep that we often draw upon it unconsciously...The communal nature of knowing goes beyond the relations of knowers; it includes *a community of interaction* between knowers and the known. (emphasis added, p. xv)

It is this community of interaction, then, with its focus on the nature of knowing (in accordance with social constructionism) and its emphasis on action that set the stage for this dissertation research. Based on conversations with faculty at Mountain Community College, fear regarding students bypassing developmental education due to Multiple Measures was part of the current equation (evident in our language, and therefore, part of our shared reality), and it was necessary to discuss the misconceptions related to this reality *as soon as possible*. The alternative, in light of the impending implementation of Multiple Measures and the impact current myth-perceptions had already had on policy-makers, in addition to faculty, was that these notions would continue to mislead instructors, negatively influence classroom practices, and harm the students themselves.

Problem Statement

The impetus for this study was the *Multiple Measures for Placement Policy* instituted by the North Carolina State Legislature. This policy dictates how “college ready” a recent high-school student may or may not be, determined primarily by a GPA of 2.6 or higher

(State Board of Community Colleges, 2015, p. 2). Because Mountain Community College opted to postpone the enactment of Multiple Measures until the mandatory deadline, this change did not take effect until the Fall of 2016. Prior to the Fall of 2016, the majority of students entering Mountain Community College took an assessment test known as the NC-DAP (The North Carolina Assessment and Placement), which determined a student's level of college readiness based on cut-scores in English, reading, and math. Preceding the NC-DAP was the ACCUPLACER, used prior to 2013 (State Board of Community Colleges, 2013). Due to data gathered from the staggered role-out of Multiple Measures across the state, the Developmental Studies program at Mountain Community College anticipated an estimated 20% decrease in the number of students enrolled in developmental courses in the Fall of 2016. Instead, these students would be able to enroll directly in curriculum math and English courses on campus, whether or not they were adequately prepared for the coursework. Compounding this implementation of Multiple Measures at Mountain Community College was instructors' reactions to its possible ramifications. For example, in discussions regarding the impending implementation of Multiple Measures on campus, a response of fear was expressed regarding the need to teach students in the curriculum classroom who would have previously tested into developmental education courses. While it is important to note that the goal of this study was *not* to castigate instructors' initial reactions or prop them up for martyrdom, it is also important to recognize how, on a larger scale, an educator's perception of a student connected to developmental education could be a problem. As Palmer (2010) observed:

More than a few academics hold the same 'frozen pond' belief about structures and culture of higher education. As long as we cling to that notion, it will remain a self-

fulfilling prophecy: the academic pond will remain frozen in its infamous resistance to change. But transformative conversations...have the proven capacity to help melt the ice. (p. 149)

After all, if educators were truly “scared” to work with students enrolled in developmental education or bypassing it due to Multiple Measures, it would not do any good to *tell* them their ideas about developmental education are wrong or to point out that they are mistakenly relying on myth-perceptions. Instead, a positive first step toward change was working together as a community of interaction to cultivate an enhanced understanding of these students.

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to examine and proliferate instructor perceptions regarding students enrolled in developmental education (or those opting to take advantage of *Multiple Measures*) at Mountain Community College and to provide instructors with a sounding board and best practices to better serve these students. For this to occur, the implementation of social constructionism within a community of interaction was key to the study because it did not limit participants to mere conversation; it did not end with words, but rather began with dialogue which resulted in actions. In addition to being theoretical, social constructionism is a *practical*, commonsense, and everyday framework for examining the processes in which reality is socially constructed. As such, it provided a nimble framework for educators to converse, collaborate *and* construct responses to myth-perceptions regarding developmental education, thereby confronting a current issue that affects North Carolina community college students statewide. Consequently, the purpose of this study was both timely and crucial: it was necessary to find ways to work together to

expand (or perhaps even transform) the scope of shared understanding among community college instructors regarding students connected to developmental education in order to broaden our campus' collective abilities to work with all students.

Research Questions

- How did a commitment to a broader understanding of students enrolled in or bypassing developmental education shape us, as educators, in light of the implementation of Multiple Measures in the Fall of 2016?
- How was the process of reflection integral to the community of interaction?

Research Approach

The purpose of this study and corresponding research questions evoked a research approach that was nested quite purposefully in *practice*. For this to occur, qualitative research was necessary: I had to be able to engage with real people in a hands-on manner that involved the formation of relationships, collaboration, communication and problem-solving. Therefore, this project was undertaken together with colleagues at Mountain Community College. After all, as Esterberg (2002) pointed out, the “outcome of research should be useful, aimed at improving the lives of those who are the subject of the research” (p. 135). The community of interaction we formed began with insider action research, with its boots-on-the-ground approach, and the research sessions provided room for discussion as well as a plethora of opportunities for immediate application within the Arts & Sciences and Academic Success divisions on campus. As Esterberg also noted: “At heart, all action researchers are concerned that research not simply contribute to our knowledge but also lead to positive changes in people’s lives” (2002, p. 137). Quite personally, somewhere around mid-September 2015, while immersed in the second year of the doctoral program, I scribbled in a

notebook during an evening class: “CC [community college] students are my life’s work.” This realization, then, is what grounded my research design and continues to guide my professional intentions.

The research study consisted of a series of four professional development sessions [Appendix A] designed to foster a community of interaction by way of insider action research. These sessions, which were offered during the Fall 2016 semester, and timed to begin when Multiple Measures was implemented at MCC, were based on Henderson and Gornik’s (2007) model of reflective inquiry, with the intention of bringing instructors together to examine and shape our understanding of ourselves as instructors as well as the distinct populations of students served at MCC. Originally, each session was designed around a series of reflective inquiry questions, with the understanding that this concept was malleable in order to react to the dynamic spiraling process that is at the heart of insider action research and to build on the work of previous sessions.

Study Setting

Mountain Community College (MCC), established in the late 1950s, is located in North Carolina. With roots as a technical college, current offerings include a variety of associate degrees, diplomas, and certificates in a wide range of technical, workplace, early college, and arts, science, or engineering-related programs. MCC’s 2015-2016 mission statement indicated that the college nurtures and empowers students through its teaching, innovation, and collaboration. Yearly enrollment in curriculum programs exceeds approximately 9000 commuting students and 9000 continuing education students.

The Researcher

I came to Mountain Community College at the start of the 2013-2014 school year and progressed from an adjunct Developmental English and Reading Instructor to full-time instructor on a 9-month contract. In May 2015, I received the Adjunct Teacher of the Year award from the college. On July 1, 2016, I stepped into a full-time, 12-month position as chair of the Developmental Studies department. Prior to teaching at MCC, I taught reluctant readers in kindergarten – 5th grades at a local elementary school. In fact, my career in education has always centered around students who are not considered to be the “academic best.” The students I work with struggle to “succeed,” if success is indeed defined by test-score standards. What this means, in reality, is that I do everything I can to assist these students on their paths to success, however they choose to define it. To me, success often resembles persistence, hard work, and the ability to hold a vision for the future despite difficult circumstances. A significant portion of my current job involves building confidences and encouraging students to put one foot in front of the other on a daily basis and not give up. I am an enthusiastic cheerleader and supporter of students at MCC. Advocacy for students, combined with autonomy in the classroom and distinct climate of care for everyone at the college, keeps me at MCC.

This personal mission also means that I am constantly looking for new ways to help our students inside and outside of the classroom at MCC. What can we do differently, what are we currently (though possibly unintentionally) neglecting or prioritizing, and what can we change or try (that also happens to be free or inexpensive)? Frequently, I realize there are no easy solutions, particularly in regards to retention or graduation rates, current buzzwords in higher education. Although these problems are overwhelming in their enormity, I

continually remind myself that asking questions is not harmful, and that is usually where I begin. For instance, at the heart of this study is true curiosity about how collaboration between departments could shape our abilities to better serve all students at MCC.

This fire fueling my desire to *do something* led me to Paulo Freire's critical approach to research. Crotty (1998) wrote of Freire: "...he was no armchair academic but spelled out in his own life and practice what he was later to articulate in his writings: that reflection without action is empty 'verbalism'" (p. 147). Crotty (1998) went on to state that "Freire's understanding of *praxis*" is "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 151). It is also important to understand, as Crotty emphasized, "True praxis can never be merely cerebral. It must involve action. Nor can it be limited to mere activism. It must include serious reflection" (1998, p. 151). This belief of praxis as reflection *and* action (as well as reflection *in* action) has resonated with me since I encountered my first reluctant readers. (In fact, it's the reason I resigned from my position at the elementary school, due to a decided *lack* of action by the school and lethargy from administration in response to the "what if?" questions I posed regarding these students.) But now at MCC, it seems I had encountered the other portion of the Freire's equation: the entrapment of glorified reflection (Crotty, 1998, p. 151). Although individuals had certainly been thinking about the situation at hand (Multiple Measures), they were not exactly motivated to change their ways. The task before me, then, was to work to achieve that balance between "merely cerebral" and "mere activism" (Crotty, 1998, p. 151). Therefore, what I needed most from the research methodology was a way to collaborate with fellow faculty in order to collectively interrogate our reasons for teaching and to improve upon our work by discussing and proposing strategies that could positively influence students' classroom experiences (and

faculty/student engagement, and even retention, if we were shooting for the moon) in the process. Was that too much to ask? I realized at the beginning of this project that my goals were and will always remain lofty, as I am a perennial optimist. But I also believed that the more I pinned down the specific values of the dissertation research, the more I would be able to apply the results to create real change.

Seen in this light, my position at Mountain Community College was all the more valuable, because the responsibility that it comes with serves as a continuous reminder that I need to do my best by the students, fellow faculty, division, and college as a whole. That said, my positionality as a researcher was also more precarious because I was both an insider, fully invested in enacting the principles of developmental education, and an outsider, holding a position of power within the department. Admittedly, this insider-outsider status as a researcher put additional demands on the integrity of the work I conducted, in terms of quality, trustworthiness, and the need for responsible and deep reflexivity, to ensure a process that was representative of the community of interaction instead of representative of my personal investment. Although the research began with the questions and approach I designed, carrying out the principles of insider-action research, while remaining mindful of my own role in the research, allowed me to react to the questions and desires of the participants within our community of interaction as we came together to share our knowledge and ideas.

Assumptions

This study hinged on the prevailing assumption that working collaboratively with colleagues through a community of interaction would shape the approaches the participants used to teach and engage students or analyze their own worlds. Another assumption going

into the study was that instructors were indeed interested and invested in analyzing both the reasons why they teach and the ways that they teach to better serve students. A third assumption was that the tools provided through the tenets of social constructionism (that is, dialogue, conversation, collaboration, and action) would provide the necessary framework for reflection within a community of interaction. The fourth assumption was that the professional development sessions, designed to support a community of interaction, would allow participants to inhabit a safe and nurturing space that provided the potential for transformation.

Finally, a word on what this study was *not*: Although part of the appeal of policy research is to “give rise to the unintended consequences” (Blackmore & Lauder, 2011, p. 193) of a particular policy, such as Multiple Measures, my concern with using policy research was that I did not want the policy *itself* to take center-stage. Too often policy discussions are limited to an assessment of the issue rather than action, and I preferred, instead, to stick with problem solving and supporting colleagues and students no matter the legislative issue at hand. Therefore, this study serves not as a statement against the implementation of Multiple Measures; rather, it merely used Multiple Measures as a starting point for conversation.

Significance of the Study

In 1964, W. Dallas Herring, “a driving force behind N.C. Community College System’s founding,” declared, “The doors to the institutions of North Carolina’s system of community colleges must never be closed to anyone of suitable age who can learn what they teach” (Quinterno, 2008, p. 210). Quinterno (2008) also noted, “An unwavering commitment to Herring’s ‘open door’ policy has become the defining characteristic of the N.C.

Community College System. To that end, state statutes require the system to admit all students who have completed high school or who are beyond the age range of the public school system” (p. 210). Herein lies the rub: a marked increase in developmental education initiatives, such as North Carolina’s most recent version, spurred *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to observe: “As the pressure on community colleges to accelerate or even eliminate remedial-education requirements intensifies, vexing questions are being asked about the impact such a shift could have on low-income and minority students” (Mangan, 2014, para. 1). It’s no mistake, after all, that students enrolled in developmental education have sometimes been referred to as “fragile” (Grubb & Gabriner, 2013, p. 36). As Mangan (2014) pointed out, “Those who are the least prepared for college stand the most to lose from policies that push students quickly into college-level classes.... And those students tend, disproportionately, to be minority and poor” (para. 2). Who *really* wins when states implement knee-jerk reactions to dramatic increases/decreases in college attendance, economic shortfalls, or inflammatory reports devaluing the benefits of developmental education (often mistakenly referred to as remedial education)? At the heart of it, isn’t it the mission (or, in fact, a state mandate) for community colleges to serve *all* students?

In the world of higher education, still steeped at times in time-worn approaches to instruction and frozen notions regarding “traditional” students, and teeming with academic and collegial responsibilities that extend beyond the classroom, embracing new perspectives toward the students we teach can be intimidating and time consuming. In fact, some may ponder if the work is even worth the trouble. However, *particularly* in the field of developmental education, where student success can be tenuous, teaching practices grounded in pedagogy best suited toward these specific students are crucial. In fact, addressing

pedagogical alignment in the community college developmental education classroom, Grubb and Cox (2005) referred to dev. ed. as one of the biggest challenges within education. Correspondingly, the National Center for Developmental Education emphasized, “The quality of classroom instruction is the single most important contributor to the success of developmental students” (Boylan, 2002, p. 68). As an educational leader, I am intensely aware of the need to provide effective, engaging instruction to students while also modeling and sharing instructional best practices with colleagues and faculty nationwide for the benefit of students in community colleges everywhere. What better place to begin than with fellow faculty at MCC?

Organization of the Dissertation

This journey of the research consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 illuminates a current issue regarding Developmental Education on community college campuses within North Carolina, stemming from the mandatory implementation of Multiple Measures in the Fall of 2016. Chapter 2 elaborates on the many policies developed around developmental education (DE) that have been put in place both state- and nationwide, touches on historical and contemporary issues within DE, and expounds on the necessity of Social Constructionism as the theoretical framework for the research. Chapter 3 provides a description of the research methodology, including the process, session designs, considerations, complications, and intentional choices that were made in regard to conducting the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings related to the professional development sessions by way of a comprehensive process profile, nested within a brief timeline of events on campus that provide context, and followed by a closing discussion on the findings as they fit within the theoretical framework. Subsequently, Chapter 5 provides a deeper discussion of the research questions as well as

implications, criticism, conclusions, and recommendations. Finally, appendices include the original planning guide for the four professional development sessions, the invitation to participate in the study, the informed consent form, an observation guide, and a list of pre- and post-session survey questions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Mr. Newman's off-color remarks were in reference to student retention numbers. He wanted to improve the university's metrics by convincing students who were unlikely to persist there to leave before they would count in the institution's retention report... Newman's approach to managing an institution whose purpose is to transform lives by building confidence, expanding imaginations and developing character is indicative of a disturbing trend in higher education. The attempt to transfer yardsticks devised in the business community to educational institutions is doomed to fail... By reducing students to statistics, the purpose of the institution's existence was lost... It is not that metrics are irrelevant, but we must find the right ones and use them in their proper place. They cannot supplant the reason we exist. (para. 6-8) — excerpt from Transylvania University President Carey's 2016 essay addressing Newman's "drown the bunnies" remark & subsequent resignation.

After a brief definition of terms, this literature review includes a discussion of policies within Higher Education that have impacted developmental education (DE) both broadly and specifically, and is followed by a historic and contemporary overview of topics germane to developmental education. This synopsis of DE is then followed by a closer look at social constructionism's application as a theoretical and practical framework for the educational inquiry described in Chapter 3.

Key Terms & Definitions

Frequently referenced terms are defined below:

Community of Interaction

In the preface of *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, Parker Palmer (1993a) wrote: "The communal nature of knowing goes beyond the relations of knowers; it includes a community of interaction between knowers and the known" (p. xv). He continued, "The myth of objectivity, which depends on a radical separation of the knower from the known, has been declared bankrupt. We now see that to know something is to have a living relationship with it – influencing and being influenced by the object itself" (p. xv). The term evokes the process as well as the individuals working in tandem. For the purposes

of this research study, a community of interaction signified the relationships, dialogue, collaboration, actions, and realizations of the research participants.

Developmental Education (DE)

According to Arendale (2007), developmental education is “a field of practice and research within higher education with a theoretical foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory. It promotes the cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners at all levels of the learning continuum” (p. 18). A recent position paper released by the National Association of Developmental Education Executive Board (2016), stated: “developmental education includes, but is not limited to, tutoring, personal/career counseling, academic advisement and coursework” (“Definition”). For the purposes of this research, DE encompasses support services as well as classroom instruction. For example, at MCC, DE is supported by an Academic Learning Center that provides free one-on-one tutoring assistance to students enrolled in classes.

Myth-perceptions

Myth-perceptions are frozen notions, stereotypes, and misconceptions that are broadly, and sometimes baldly, held. As such, they reflect the danger of ideology, as well as its buoyancy, as they continue to be perpetuated throughout society. Koch (2005) specifically referred to this type of “conceptual ordering of the world,” a world constructed on misconceptions, as a myth (p. 129). The benefit of identifying a myth-perception is the ability to disrupt and proliferate perceptions related to it via ideology critique, which creates a space for alternative or additional understandings without pointing fingers.

Social Constructionism

Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Gergen’s (2015) concise definition of social constructionism read: “what we take to be the truth about the world importantly depends on the social relationships of which we are a part” (p. 3). The epistemology of social constructionism is this: our knowledge is always based on our relationships, negotiated through these relationships, and subject to change. As such, our interactions with each other are vitally important.

The Impact of Policy: Past to Present

In 1960, California’s Department of Education revealed their “Master Plan for Higher Education” to the California State Legislature, following a 1959 mandate to prepare a proposal that encompassed no less than “the development, expansion, and integration of the facilities, curriculum, and standards of higher education, in junior colleges, state colleges, the University of California, and other institutions of higher education of the State. . .” (California State Department of Education, 1960, p. v). The impetus for this master plan stemmed from apprehension regarding rapidly increasing higher education enrollments in tandem with “the state’s financial outlook, and a growing concern that competition and unnecessary, wasteful duplication between the state colleges and the University of California might cost the taxpayers millions of dollars” (p. xi). In fact, the plan’s authors identified the students themselves as the primary problem and asked: “How many have there been, how many are there, how many will there be in the next 15 years in the higher education

institutions of California?” (p. 45). In determining where students should go, the authors proposed a solution by way of percentages: “In order to raise materially standards for admission to the lower division, the state colleges select first-time freshmen from the top one-third (33 1/3%) and the University from the top one-eighth (12 1/2%) of all graduates of California public high schools” (p. 4). Among the plan’s recommendations for selection criteria regarding “The Problem of Quality” were the following tips:

- The best students should be granted their first choice. The Technical Committee on Selection and Retention of Students stressed the importance of giving the exceptional applicant the privilege of choosing where he is to go.
- The more advanced student could be favored over the less advanced. (p. 80-81)

The California Department of Education’s proposed solution, a three-pronged approach to higher education, would “divert to the junior colleges some 50,000 lower division students from the 1975 estimates for the state colleges and the University of California, and the attendant savings to the state resulting therefrom” (p. 13). Subsequently, a special legislative session was convened to approve the three-tier system (with corresponding percentages) under the Donahoe Higher Education Act (University of California Office of the President, 2007), and the rest, as they say, is history. Though certainly not the first nor most flagrant, California’s “Master Plan for Higher Education” soundly illustrated a prevailing notion still evident in legislatures today: *If they’re not the best students, we shouldn’t have to pay as much for them.*

Fast forward 50+ years: A headline in *The Atlantic* posed the following question: “Why is Florida ending remedial education for college students?” (Ross, 2014, para. 1). Note: in this context, *remedial education* was mistakenly used interchangeably for

*developmental education*². Developmental education courses are, in fact, available on college campuses nationwide: 99.5% of all public 2-year institutions offered these services during the 2012 – 2013 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). According to Ross (2014), “In Florida this fall, a new law will force all of the state's public colleges and universities to presume that all students who graduated from a Florida public high school after 2004 are academically prepared for college” (para. 3). Acknowledging that the colleges and universities would still be able to advise students to take developmental education, Ross concluded, “In the end, though, students themselves will decide whether they want to enroll in remedial classes or enter directly into introductory courses” (para. 3). In further discussion regarding the “why,” Ross observed, “Lawmakers in a number of states—including Colorado, Connecticut, North Carolina and Texas—are forcing colleges to implement a whole range of remedial-education reforms” (para. 7). Note also the reason behind Florida’s forced abandonment of courses: Ross (2014) wrote, “These developments come as the recession and federal budget cuts have left many states struggling to manage their budgets” (para. 7). Budget cuts often spell bad news for students enrolled in developmental education.

The cost cutting story progresses to present day: Heralding the success of the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), established in 2010 by the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) “to transform the condition of developmental education for its students,” a report generated by The Hunt Institute lauded a significant decrease in “remedial” enrollment which had *also* resulted in a significant reduction in the

² The National Association of Developmental Education recently released a position paper acknowledging that “Our critics have incorrectly identified remedial and developmental education as synonyms. This foundational mistake has been the cause of much of our angst and their inflammable rhetoric” (2016, para. 6).

annual cost of developmental education (Grovenstein, 2015, p. 3). With an emphasis on student choice, fewer prerequisite classes, and time and cost savings for both student and state, these initiatives may sound like the perfect (i.e. governmentally tidy) win-win. Upon closer inspection, however, these solutions are merely the result of a legislative shell game, when too many students – especially those some perceive to be on the “less advanced” end – start grubbing at the money pot. As it happens, this push and pull dynamism between politics, policies, and program implementation has a long-standing history within the field of developmental education.

History of Developmental Education

Developmental education (DE), in one form or another, has been a mainstay in postsecondary education for hundreds of years. The implementation of developmental education *practices* in postsecondary education began in the 1600s with the tutoring of Latin, Greek, and math to catch students up to speed (Arendale, 2014; Boylan & White, 1987). For nearly as long, administrators in the academy have countered this necessity to supplement instruction with a demand for students who are adequately prepared. For example, Brier (1984) noted that in 1828, Yale called for an end to “defective preparation” (p. 2). However, in 1869, incoming Harvard president Charles Eliot emphasized that “The American college is obliged to supplement the American school. Whatever elementary instruction the schools fail to give, the college must supply” (as cited in Brier, 1984, p. 2). Although the term “developmental education” emerged in the 1970s, Brier (1984) also observed: “The popular belief that the academically underprepared student and developmental education efforts are by-products of the open admissions of the 1960s is no more than a widely believed myth” (p. 2). The under-preparation of students for college leaves in its wake years and years of laying

blame on elementary and secondary schools, pushing the burden of responsibility onto “someone” else, whomever that might be, or outright denial of students who aren’t perceived to be up to par (i.e. see “Save the Bunnies!” commentary at the beginning of Chapter 1 of this document). Consider the following scenario that occurred in the mid-1990s involving the California State University system:

In 1994 about half of the incoming freshmen in the twenty-two-campus California State University (CSU) system needed remedial work in English or math (Kirst, 1997). The trustees of the CSU system proposed shifting 90 percent of its remedial education to the community colleges by the year 2007, charging that the need to provide so many remedial courses “threaten[ed] the value of a CSU diploma.” (as cited in Ignash, 1997, p. 6)

Ignash (1997) also reported that the CSU trustees later put the policy proposal on hold. Similarly, in March of 2016 *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that “the University of North Carolina system might soon have to make its least-qualified admitted students earn a community-college degree before permitting them to enroll,” an idea the article attributed to current Republican state lawmakers (Brown, 2016, para 1). In the race for a balanced budget, the contentious relationship between politicians, college administrators, and developmental education is exposed by the dismissal, reticence to believe, or half-hearted acceptance of the fact that incoming students have *long* required supplemental instruction in order to achieve in college.

In fact, DE has served as a gateway for hundreds of thousands of students on community college campuses nationwide. For instance, current research indicates that between 58%-59% of students in 2-year colleges were enrolled in at least one remedial or

developmental education course (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Bailey, 2009). Although the terms “remedial” and “developmental” have both been used to refer to education interventions, Boylan, Bonham, & White (1999) distinguished “remedial” as referring “to courses generally considered to be precollege,” whereas developmental courses are “designed to fill the gaps between high school preparation and college expectations” (p. 88). In addition, DE encompasses more than just classroom instruction: According to Arendale (2007), DE “refers to a field of practice and research within higher education with a theoretical foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory” (p. 2). As such, “It promotes the cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners at all levels of the learning continuum” (as cited in Booth, Capraro, Capraro, Chaudhuri, Dyer, & Marchbanks, 2014, p. 2). Nowadays, DE most frequently consists of math or reading and writing courses ordered sequentially and supported by tutoring or learning assistance centers (Perin, 2014). Specific to North Carolina, in 2013 the state’s Developmental Education Initiative approved the current English, reading, and writing and math course designs and designations for NC community colleges. The courses are known as Developmental English and Reading, or DRE, and Developmental Math, or DMA (Developmental Education Initiative, 2013). Today, in 2017, DRE courses are typically presented in a series of three 8-week modules, though students are tested and placed into a specific DRE course or courses based on their assessed skill level and may not need to complete every course in the series. The reasoning for this present redesign in North Carolina community colleges was based on a need to offer students an accelerated alternative to developmental education that would expedite their time expended on non-credit bearing coursework and prerequisites while also saving the students (and the state) money in pursuit of college completion. As such, North Carolina’s curricular

redesign is extremely indicative of current conversations taking place around the topic of developmental education.

Contemporary DE Issues: Cost, Assessment, Completion Rates

Since its inception, developmental education has seen its share of controversy; in particular, three contemporary issues that demonstrate this assertion are cost, assessment, and completion rates.

Cost

A significant impetus behind North Carolina's current redesign was the desire to reduce cost. Discussing preliminary results of North Carolina's present Developmental Education Initiative, Grovenstein (2015) wrote, "With this decline in remedial enrollment, the annual cost has been significantly reduced – a reduction that has saved both students in lower tuition and in time, and the state budget in reduced need for appropriation to fund developmental coursework" (p. 3). Part of the cost issue in North Carolina is undoubtedly related to its sheer size. According to census data, in 2013-2014 alone the state added 95,000 residents, and it is presently the ninth largest state in the nation with a population close to 10 million (North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, 2016). Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, and Vigdor (2014) noted that NC has 58 community colleges, which ranks it 3rd in the nation for the number of community colleges it supports, behind just California and Texas (p. 355). Quinterno (2008) wrote that "some 800,000 individuals walked through the open doors of North Carolina's community colleges during the 2005-06 academic year," a time of great growth across the state (p. 207). In addition, according to Loney (2011), The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) "found that 61 percent of first-time, credential-seeking students were enrolled in at least one developmental course in English,

reading, or math in 2009; 33 percent were enrolled in two or more developmental courses” (p. 3). As we’ve already learned from California’s anticipation of a population boom in the 1960s, rapid growth combined with open access education is often a precursor to new policy.

Nationwide, DE continues to generate press related to cost. Crisp and Delgado (2014) addressed this national “remediation crisis” when they wrote that remediation “has enormous costs to government, taxpayers, post-secondary institutions, and students at all levels. The national cost of community college remediation is estimated to be between 1.9 and 2.3 billion dollars annually” (p. 100). Ignash (1997) provided a counter for this myopic perspective, though, when she reminded us, “Media coverage that reports costs for remediation outside the context of all instructional costs, however, is misleading” (p. 7). Consider, for instance, Martinez and Bain’s (2013) synopsis that revealed that “usually state costs for remediation are between 1% - 2% of education as a whole” and that “the unit cost of a remedial class is relatively lower than the cost of all other courses that count toward a degree” (p. 5). In reality, DE represents a tiny fraction of a state’s entire education budget. Crisp and Delgado (2014) addressed another public misperception related to the cost of remediation when they stated, “many argue that taxpayers are being “double billed” for teaching college students academic skills already taught at the K-12 level” (p. 100). This truly is an old argument. Tackling seven myths about developmental education, Boylan and Bonham (1994) noted two erroneous assumptions about this argument years ago: “The first is that everything a student needs to know to be able to succeed in college is taught in high school” and “the second is that students leave high school after having learned these skills and go directly to college” (p. 34). Neither, they say, is true. But why, then, does such a small slice of the education pie continue to receive a disproportionately large amount of attention?

Assessment

Compounding the argument against developmental education is the considerable debate surrounding a college's ability to accurately assess and place incoming students. Consider, for instance, the proclivities of college placement exams on the fate of a student. The placement exam is a key factor during enrollment because "92 percent of two-year institutions use the resulting scores for placement" (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2010, p. 1). Correspondingly, as Bailey (2009) postulated, "Developmental education assessments are in reality high-stakes tests. Failing such tests often leads to enrollment in remediation with attendant costs and delayed progress for students" (p. 22). The stakes are high, yet Bailey contended that the differences between developmental and non-developmental students were ultimately arbitrary (p. 23). Placement inaccuracies have been an issue, too. As noted by Jaggars, Hodara, and Stacey (2013), although these standardized, computerized placement tests were designed to efficiently evaluate thousands of incoming students, "this short-term efficiency goes hand-in-hand with high rates of student misplacement," (p. 6) involving "up to one third of entering students" who were misplaced after taking the ACCUPLACER or COMPASS placement tests (p. 7). How can these assessment issues best be addressed? Jaggars et al. (2013) pointed to the use of "the *best of* either high school transcript data or assessment test scores" in order to combat severe placement errors (p. 7). This argument was based on data from Belfield and Crosta (2012), who made the case for using high school GPA to determine placement following their review of several statewide data sets. Belfield and Crosta's (2012) argument hinged on the assumption that success in college is a C average. Based on this assumption, they proposed that simply using GPA might make it "justifiable to waive college placement tests – and so waive developmental education" for

students with a high school GPA of 2.6 or higher. Using this rule-of-thumb, the authors postulated that students would likely maintain a GPA that was .6 of a point lower in college, so around a 2.0 if the student averaged a 2.6 in high school (p. 39). But is a GPA threshold really the magic wand for eradicating all of developmental education?

Indeed, steps taken by North Carolina's Developmental Education Initiative *directly reflect* these findings regarding assessment errors and GPA considerations. Referencing the *Multiple Measures for Placement Policy* (Multiple Measures), which applies to students who have graduated from high school within the past five years, taken four English and math courses in high school, and maintained a GPA that is equal to or greater than 2.6, Grovenstein (2015) stated: "As a result of the new placement policy, students who previously would have been required to take an 'off the shelf' placement test may now be placed directly in college-level coursework, dramatically increasing the likelihood of college success" (p. 2). In addition, a new placement test has replaced older "off the shelf" computerized tests:

For those students now required to be assessed, NCCCS has created a new diagnostic placement test to custom fit the developmental curricula. By identifying specific weaknesses and aligning the test items with the developmental curricula, the North Carolina Diagnostic Assessment and Placement test (NC DAP) will result in reduced time enrolled in developmental courses. (Grovenstein, 2015, pp. 2-3)

Again, is a 2.0 GPA the sole determinant of "dramatic" success? What Multiple Measures and the NC DAP do *not* do is provide a holistic overview of a student's ability to persist in college.

In terms of accuracy, how would a more well-rounded view of students' abilities assist with placement? Fowler and Boylan (2010) pointed out that "tests assess only their academic (cognitive) abilities" (p. 2). Yet, Finkelstein and Thom (2014) observed that personal factors make an impact, too, and stipulated that considering these additional factors would allow academic advisors to more accurately advise students. Correspondingly, Zientek, Schneider, and Onwuegbuzie (2014) cited situational factors and dispositional factors as issues that impacted the success of students enrolled in developmental education (p. 69). Therefore, Boylan (2009) proposed a new model for student placement that was based on the assumption that "although the traditional practice of placing students into remedial courses based on a single cut score on a cognitive assessment instrument is efficient, it is not necessarily effective" (p. 14). The TIDES model, or Targeted Intervention for Developmental Education Students, proposed by Boylan (2009) would allow advisors to use "a combination of cognitive, affective, and personal information about students to develop more integrated intervention plans for underprepared students" (p. 15). The benefit of starting with a well-rounded approach to placement (considering academic and affective factors) could reap long-term benefits, too. In fact, Fowler and Boylan (2010) found that students of a 2-year college who participated in a Pathways to Success (PWAY) program, a tailored and comprehensive approach designed to reach students enrolled in DE academically (in terms of tutoring and developmental coursework), combined with "clear student guidelines, intrusive academic advising, and transitional coursework to address the nonacademic and personal factors," resulted in the following improvements: "increases in the mean GPA of students in the program, increases in the number of students in good academic standing, increases in success in developmental education courses, and increases in the 1-

year retention rate” (p. 2). Ultimately, improvements to assessment measures, placement, and advising could also lead to institutional increases in retention.

Completion Rates

Retention is a buzzword on many administrators’ lips these days as completion rates across the board for community college students, as well as those in developmental coursework, are very low. In a national review of college completion rates, Shapiro, Dunder, Yuan, Harrell, and Wakhungu (2014) found that 39.1% of first-time students who started at a 2-year institution in the fall of 2008 had completed a degree or certificate within 6 years (p. 31). According to Attewell et al. (2006), using a data set from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of students tracked from 8th grade - college, only 28% of remedial students graduated within 8.5 years (p. 915). In fact, in an overview of the developmental sequence, Bailey, Jeong, and Cho (2008) analyzed data from the Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count initiative, and found that *more* students abandoned course sequences because *they didn’t even enroll* in a developmental course “than because they failed a course” (p. 31). Encountering the need to take developmental courses, students were deserting community colleges before they’d even had a chance to begin.

Part of the completion issue (which perhaps also provides an explanation for abandoned college plans) revolves around time expended: students who do begin their college studies in developmental education face a longer road to completion. Developmental courses do not “typically count toward a degree or certification” (Crisp & Delgado, 2014), but are often required as prerequisites and must be taken prior to the curriculum-level classes. Discrepancies also abound regarding whether developmental courses help or hinder students in the long run. Bailey (2009) found that “31% of those referred to developmental math

complete their course” and “about 44% of those referred to developmental reading complete their full sequence” (p. 14). Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez (2015) go so far as to posit three roles for remediation in colleges: “as development for future coursework, discouragement from further study, or simply a diversion onto a separate track” (p. 2), and then question the effectiveness of any student “development” that is occurring in “diversionary” courses (p. 29). On the other hand, Bahr (2010) found that postsecondary remediation was successful in “ameliorating both moderate and severe skill deficiencies, and both single and dual skill deficiencies” for students enrolled in DE courses (p. 199). Crisp and Delgado (2014) determined that students enrolled in developmental coursework “were slightly more likely to persist when compared with non-developmental students (79% compared with 77%)” (p. 112). In addition, from a sample of North Carolina’s public school 8th graders (tracked from 1999 through community college), Clotfelter et al. (2014) found “no adverse effects on the probability of returning for another semester” for students who took a remedial course their *first* semester (p. 354). That said, they, too, questioned the role of “diversionary” coursework (p. 371) after concluding that remediation did reduce a student’s likelihood of “overall college success,” though perhaps not “in the short run” (p. 368). Are developmental courses a stumbling block, or are they simply bearing the brunt of an orchestrated political/legislative attack directed toward retracting open access?

What’s really driving this love-to-hate relationship with developmental education of late? Boylan and Trawick (2015) repudiated recent legislative action regarding DE when they wrote: “The level of policy activity related to developmental education that has occurred over the last few years has been unprecedented, and it is clear that it is due at least in part to the maelstrom of bad press” (p. 29). Addressing a report from Complete College America that

called for the elimination of remedial courses, and was the impetus for much of this bad press, Boylan and Trawick (2015) noted this significant oversight:

...it pays little attention to the fact that it is not uncommon for students participating in remediation to come from low-income backgrounds, to be first-generation students, to come from minority populations historically-underrepresented in higher education, and/or to be non-native speakers of English -- in addition to being academically underprepared. Many are also non-traditional learners, returning to school after many years and/or carrying financial responsibilities for themselves and their families. All of these characteristics are associated with poor academic performance in college. (p. 28)

Correspondingly, a 2016 position paper from the National Association of Developmental Education acknowledged, “The attacks on our field the past 7 years have given us more than enough pain,” then added, “But much of this pain has come from our mistakenly accepting the unfounded assumptions of our critics—that we are nothing more than ineffective proponents of broken remediation classes” (para. 2). Given its history regarding cost, assessment, and completion rates, developmental education is currently a political hotbed of contention. Rarely mentioned in these contemporary discussions, however, are the students themselves.

DE Student Characteristics

Just who are these students who have demanded so much of our money, time, and attention for so long, and *why* are they so important? Historically, college students have been classified as “traditional” or “non-traditional” when in reality “traditional” students are heavily outnumbered. Discussing the marginalized majority of postsecondary students, Deil-

Amen (2011) emphasized, “Our conceptions of the typical idealized college student are based on traditional notions and an imagined norm of someone who begins college immediately after high school, enrolls full-time, lives on campus, and is ready to begin college level classes” (p. 1). She stated, “In contrast to the popular image of what a college student is, enrollment data reveals a different picture” (p. 1) According to 2010 data from the National Center for Education Statistics, 38% of first-year students are 24 or older, 53% are not enrolled full-time, and “a shocking mere 13% of beginning students live on campus, while about half commute from off-campus” (Deil-Amen, 2011, p. 4). Deil-Amen added, “in many of the broad access public universities... a diverse and multicultural student body is present and growing. In fact, currently, in the *other half* of higher education, such diversity abounds, and this abundance occurs along multiple dimensions, not just racial/ethnic and SES. In this sense, diversity is the norm, not the exception” (p. 5). The differences between “traditional” and “non-traditional” students are particularly important on these two counts: First, as Ignash (1997) wrote, “For policy purposes, the difference in age groups of students who take remedial/developmental courses is an important one” (p. 10). She continued, “Legislators and the public more easily accept the fact that an older, returning student needs a refresher math or writing class than the fact that a student who enters college right out of high school is unprepared” (p. 10). Secondly, as suggested by Clotfelter et al. (2014), there may be a distinction between the impact of DE on traditional-age students versus older students, and they cautioned against concluding “that remediation is ineffective for all types of community college students” (p. 372). Early evidence from Florida’s 2014 redesign supports this distinction, as Hu et al. (2016) found that students aged 25 and older were still choosing to enroll in developmental education classes and were, in fact, succeeding at a

higher passing rate than before the redesign. A significant gap in the literature and current policies regarding developmental education exists due to the assumption (myth-perception) that the “traditional” student is representative of the entire student body enrolled in developmental coursework.

From its founding in 1976, the National Center for Developmental Education (NCDE) has conducted research in the field of DE (Arendale, 2014, p. 50). Addressing the “most basic concept” in developmental education, the NCDE noted that DE students are “complete human beings. Their attitudes toward learning, their motivation, their self-concepts, and their confidence have as much or more to do with their success in college as do their academic skills” (Boylan, 2002, p. 35). In addition, as Jaggars, Hodara, Cho and Xu (2015) noted, “Studies of student progression suggest that up to 15% of developmental students do not return to college for the next course in the sequence even though they were successful in every developmental course they attempted” and concluded, “It seems likely that external factors (rather than academic difficulties) are the key force pulling these students away” (p. 5). Consider, for example, the fact that DE students make up a significant portion of the work force. Jaggars et al. (2015) shared these current statistics: “an estimated 79% of community college students are employed, with a typical workweek of 32 hours per week; 35% care for dependents, including 15% who are single parents” (p. 5). In addition, “perhaps half are vulnerable to drop out due to financial concerns” (p. 5). Jaggars et al. (2015) also pointed out, “many community college students—whether developmental or college-ready—are pulled away from college re-enrollment by external factors such as employment or child care responsibilities” (p. 5). It is important to understand that DE students attend community college for a variety of reasons, represent a range of ages and

background experiences, and juggle academic obligations along with life, family, and employment demands. Overtime opportunities, unreliable transportation, a lack of childcare, snow days for the school system, sick children or family members, and personal health and welfare are all factors that contribute to student absences from class. Therefore, it is essential to provide busy developmental education students who are striving to balance life, work, and family with multiple avenues for completing not only coursework, but developmental sequences as well. Accordingly, Clotfelter et al. (2014) noted, “the benefits of remedial education would be greater if methods of delivering the courses were improved” (p. 372). It is easy to see that DE students are diverse in an array of ways, and, accordingly, deserve more than antiquated or frozen notions regarding instruction.

DE Educators

Even quieter than discussions of the students themselves in the debate over DE are the faculty who teach these students on a daily basis, possibly due in part to the fact that the majority are adjuncts (Datray, Saxon, & Martirosyan, 2014) whose colleges have declined to invest in professional development, full-time positions, and funding to fuel their expertise in the field. Despite a lack of prioritization, however, the need for quality instruction for these diverse developmental education students is essential. Addressing pedagogical alignment in the community college classroom, Grubb and Cox (2005) stated, “Developmental education in community colleges is one of the most difficult challenges our entire education system has to face” (p. 102). Correspondingly, the NCDE emphasized, “The quality of classroom instruction is the single most important contributor to the success of developmental students” (Boylan, 2002, p. 68). Providing a setting where students can learn and guide their own growth is crucial to their success. Grubb and Cox (2005) specified four primary contributing

factors leading to the success or failure of a DE learning environment: the students, the instructor, the curriculum, and the institutional setting. Alarming, McCabe and Day (1998) proposed that “as many as two million students a year would leave postsecondary education if they did not have access to developmental education” (as cited in Boylan, 2002, p. 37). In 2002, the NCDE produced a research-based guide to best practices, which stated that DE students benefit from a centralized program that provides additional tutoring, activities, and support services; Boylan et al. (1999) referred to this as a “continuum of services” (p. 88) designed to assist students. Additional services, of course, cost money, as do instructors. Specific to instructional best practices, Boylan et al. (1999) recommended using a “theory-based approach” as a “basis for the design and delivery of instruction” (p. 92), versus relying on the teaching tactics the instructor may have experienced when she or he was a student. The NCDE guide also placed heavy emphasis on the importance of constructing learning communities, designed to encourage diversification of instructional methods in order to reach students with varied learning styles. Suggested methods include distance or computer-aided instruction, one-on-one instruction, peer review, collaborative and group work, and active learning approaches (Boylan, 2002, p. 73). In addition, Boylan, Bonham, and Tafari (2005) emphasized the importance of building trust in the classroom, which is often much harder to accomplish with a transitional, part-time instructional workforce, and Kuh et al. found that “student engagement in educationally purposeful activities during the first year of college had a positive, statistically significant effect on persistence, even after controlling for background characteristics, other college experiences... academic achievement, and financial aid” (as cited in Pruett & Absher, 2015, p. 36). Boylan et al. (1999) believed that a variety of instructional approaches afforded “synergistic benefits” for those involved (p. 92). Despite

the longevity of DE, it is imperative that educators continue the search for best practices and effective instructional approaches in order to reach and retain as many students as possible; doing so will only enhance educators and administrators' abilities to justify developmental education's role as a cornerstone of higher education. Indeed, these instructional best practices emphasize a classroom that extends beyond its walls with the assistance of support services, and revolves around a continuous loop of community, interaction, conversation, co-construction of knowledge, reflection, collaboration, action and advocacy, all designed to foster student engagement.³

Addressing the Gap

Currently, a critical disconnect exists between developmental education policy and faculty input. Calling for DE faculty to claim their seats at the table, Neuburger, Goosen, and Barry (2013) cautioned: "When faculty voices remain silent, the results that trickle down to classrooms and testing centers in the form of policies and legislation often do not reflect the best research nor respect the diverse needs of students" (p. 73). As is evident regarding DE, "Most policies affecting higher education are made at the state level. Legislators and state higher education executive offices generally do not consult practitioners in establishing statewide policies" (Boylan & Bonham, 2014, p. 251). As a result, "state higher education policy flows downhill, and at the bottom of that hill are the professionals who have to implement it" (Boylan & Bonham, 2014, p. 251). This detachment between policy and practice is only all too real for the states entrenched in initiatives related to developmental education.

³ It is by no mistake that these best practices were mimicked in the professional development design for this research study.

For example, returning one year later to the state of Florida, and its “end of remedial education” in 2014, an Inside Higher Ed report stated, “More students at Florida's two-year colleges are failing college-level courses in the aftermath of a new state law that allows them to skip remediation” (Smith, 2015, para. 1). The report also noted: “Plenty of students ignored those recommendations” to take developmental courses (para. 11). In fact, “For those students who chose to take college-level math when they were advised to take the developmental equivalent, only 2 out of 10 passed with a C or better in the spring 2014 semester, according to the college” (para. 12). In addition, “St. Petersburg [a Florida community college] also learned that students who failed college-level math or English courses were more likely to put off retaking those courses or not return to college” (Smith, 2015, para. 20). Despite these early results across Florida, however, North Carolina continued to push forward with the mandatory statewide implementation of Multiple Measures on community college campuses by Fall 2016.

At the Axis of Theory and Practice

What, if anything, can we do about the day-to-day delivery of instruction in the midst of policy reform and constant change? In its current definition of DE, NADE (2016) emphasized: “Developmental education includes, but is not limited to, tutoring, personal/career counseling, academic advisement and coursework. It is reclaiming our knowledge and power as educators. It is speaking professionally using all we know about education to create better solutions for all students” (“Definition”). In a recent study of members of the National Association of Developmental Education, regarding a question of what research was needed to inform meaningful practice within the field, the number one request was for *best practices in instruction* (Saxon, Martirosyan, Wentworth, & Boylan,

2015). As one of only two full-time Developmental Reading and English instructors at a North Carolina community college that serves thousands of students, I am intensely aware of the privilege of my position, the constant need to provide engaging instruction to my students, and the necessity of professional development for all who work with students currently enrolled in developmental education coursework as well as those students who will bypass these courses. This need is likely *especially* true for those educators who encountered them, perhaps for the first time, in their classrooms in the fall.

For me, the need to *do something* at MCC was front and center: after all, what better place to conduct further research regarding developmental education professional development and best practices than in my own backyard, at the crossroads of policy and practice? In order to take the first step along this journey, it was necessary to rely on social constructionism to confront the ideology. After all, it is a myth-perception to say that students needing developmental coursework don't exist or to assume that eliminating remediation will correspondingly evaporate students who need our support (especially those above the age of 24 or 25, a significant proportion of current community college enrollment). In addition, merely shuffling students around is not going to solve the problem, *especially* if we happen to be handing them off to educators who cling to frozen notions toward teaching and toward the students themselves. Then, after identifying the myth, it was important to see what we could do to engage and diffuse it. What follows in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are the methodology, findings, interpretations, and implications related to the research study. First up, though, is an exploration of social constructionism as it relates to provoking the ideology that surrounds the term “developmental education,” as two areas of emphasis within this

philosophy connect the dots between theory and practice: the key assumptions related to the theory and social constructionism's usefulness as a framework for research.

Key Assumptions of Social Constructionism

First, let us look at the epistemology, ontology (or lack thereof), and axiology of social constructionism, as well as its relationship to constructivism.

Knowledge in a Shared Reality

In terms of epistemology, how do we know what we know? According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), knowledge is built in the everyday experience with others. As Crotty (1998) distinguished, "Human being means being-in-the-world" (p. 45). Therefore, "We have something to work with. What we have to work with is the world and the objects in the world" (p. 45). Simply stated, we know what we know because we have interacted with others. Crotty (1998) continued, "Because of the essential relationship that human experience bears to its object, no object can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it, nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object" (p. 45). Our knowledge, then, is always based on our relationships, negotiated through these relationships, and subject to change. As such, "What constructionism drives home unambiguously is that there is *no* true or valid interpretation" (Crotty, 1998, p. 47). Thankfully, especially when considering prevalent myths in society, it is a relief to know that *what we know is always shifting* based on our interactions with others. A central tenet of social constructionism is that we are not restricted to one central, limiting Truth about the world or ourselves.

In fact, in terms of Truth, Gergen (2015) warned: "Whenever we are certain about what is real, we seal ourselves off from other possibilities" (p. 220). For example, "If the

earth simply is flat, a once obvious fact, there is no room for those who wish to explore the potentials of ‘round...’” (p. 220). Trouble enters, then, when we try to determine specifically or exactly what *is* real. Gergen (2015) emphasized, “When we make declarations of the real – what is true, what really happened, what must be the case – we also close off options for dialogue” (p. 220). After all, he questioned, “How many thousands have been slaughtered in the name of Truth?” (p. 220). Knowledge, then, is never settled, stagnant, or dominated by one clear Truth, but is instead continuously renegotiated. It revolves around the assumption that multiple meanings co-exist, and that *all* meaning is constructed together.

Constructing Knowledge through Language

It also follows that language is essential to meaning. Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasized over and over again: “The most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation” (p. 152). Dialogue, language, conversation, interaction, and questioning are all necessary ingredients in the construction of knowledge. Gergen (2015) labeled dialogue “the language we live by” (p. 35). Berger and Luckmann (1966) heralded language “the most important sign system of human society” (p. 37) and noted that it “possesses an inherent quality of reciprocity that distinguishes it from any other sign system” (p. 37). Berger and Luckmann went on to state, “Language originates in and has its primary reference to everyday life; it refers above all to the reality I experience in wide-awake consciousness” (p. 38). Language helps us know what we know. Crotty (1998) elaborated on this concept when he wrote, “Consciousness, in other words, is always consciousness *of something*” (p. 44). Therefore, though the world may be “pregnant with potential meaning, actual meaning

emerges only where consciousness engages” with it (p. 43). An illustration of this is Crotty’s example of *tree*:

What the ‘commonsense’ view commends to us is that the tree standing before us is a tree. It has all the meaning we ascribe to a tree. It would be a tree, with that same meaning, whether anyone knew of its existence or not. We need to remind ourselves here that it is human beings who have construed it a tree, given it the name, and attributed to it the associations we make with trees. (p. 43)

In this manner, as Crotty also noted, “Meaning (or truth) cannot be described simply as ‘objective.’ By the same token, it cannot be described simply as ‘subjective’ (p. 43).

Connecting the dots: “Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways... In this view of things, subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning” (p. 9).

For instance, the tree could mean a purveyor of life to an arborist, a play place for a small child, and a habitat for an animal. Similarly, consider the potential of a developmental student in a classroom: an instructor considers the student to be a learner, engaged and willing to learn, and teaches to a variety of learning styles, using real-world contexts to facilitate learning. The student, on the other hand, shares his or her thoughts, questions, and understanding in conversation with the instructor and classmates, thereby guiding and deepening his/her learning as the course progresses.

In both examples, it is clear that meaning is made *together*. Here again, the introduction of dialogue removes emphasis on the need for a single Truth and steers the conversation instead toward shared interaction, description, and the generation of knowledge: we know what we know because we’ve constructed the meaning of it together through

language. Consequently, constructionist dialogues pave the way for potential, openness, and multiple perspectives that shape our knowledge (which, again, is perpetually growing, changing, evolving). The fundamental malleability of this epistemology is extremely important. Not only does social construction allow us to identify myths, but it also provides a fitting method for dismantling prevalent myth-perceptions held within all aspects of society.

Regarding Ontology

If our understanding is continuously shaped by those around us, how do we know what *really* exists? According to Andrews (2012), referring specifically to Berger and Luckmann's writing, social construction "makes no ontological claims, confining itself to the social construction of knowledge, therefore confining itself to making epistemological claims only" (n.p.). Social constructionism does not, however, deny that things exist. Andrews (2012) explained: "The idea that disease can and does exist as an independent reality is compatible with the social constructionist view. The naming of disease and indeed what constitutes disease is arguably a different matter and has the potential to be socially constructed" (n.p.). Echoing this stance, Gergen (1994) wrote, "Constructionism is ontologically mute. Whatever is, simply is" (p. 72). It is our understanding of what *is*, of course, that frequently changes. I associate this perspective most closely with a resistance to binary thinking: while refusing to view anything as strictly black or white, I simultaneously acknowledge the existence of a gamut of gray or multiple grays. This is, admittedly, murky. Confronting criticism regarding social constructionism, Gergen (2015) emphasized, "Constructionists do not argue against our speaking in realist terms. However, they do warn that we must be careful in treating these daily realities as unquestionably and universally REAL" (p. 220). Koch (2005), too, noted: "Absolutes are simply unobtainable" (p. 135).

Harkening this subjectivity, Nietzsche (2005), in fact, went so far as to say: “The ‘thing in itself’ (which is precisely what the pure truth, apart from any of its consequences, would be) is likewise something quite incomprehensible to the creator of language and something not in the least worth striving for” (pp. 16-17). Following Nietzsche’s train of thought, do we really need to concern ourselves with labels, categories, or quantifying reality in order to move forward?

Forgoing a search for one clear Truth, social constructionism’s transparency presents potentiality: Koch (2005) emphasized, “what is important for human society is that it maintain a questioning attitude” (p. 135), and Gergen (2015) reminded us, “Constructionist ideas are not maps of the world as it is; they are resources for people to use” (p. 225). As such, social constructionism “does not seek itself to be a *final* word, but an orientation to life” (p. 225). What this really means is that we are providing ourselves with endless options. Koch (2005) stressed, “if we have negated the possibility of a metanarrative on who we are and how we must act, then the space to engage in discourse becomes entirely human. However, in this context the task is not one of defining who we are” (p. 120). Instead, opportunity comes from the fact that “The real questions have to do with how we would like to live” (p. 120). Correspondingly, a student’s success is no longer determined nor limited by one’s binary way of thinking, but ripe with possibility.

Creating and Sustaining Values

Opening the door to possibility paves the way for opportunity. Embracing this perspective, Gergen (2015) stressed, “If all that we take to be real, rational, and good issues from social process, then we have enormous potential for creating worlds together” (pp. 27-28). It is this optimism, in fact, that harkens another guiding principle of social

constructionism, in terms of *value*. Within Gergen's (2015) list of four constructionist proposals we encounter a rationale for the axiology of social constructionism:

- The ways in which we describe and explain the world are not required by "what there is"
- The ways in which we describe and explain the world are outcomes of relationships
- Constructions gain their significance from their social utility
- Values are created and sustained within forms of life. (pp. 8-12)

Elaborating on this fourth point, Gergen (2015) wrote, "As we relate together, develop languages, and trusted patterns of living so do we develop values" (p. 12). He then linked these values to research when he wrote, "As we confront the world, our descriptions and explanations emerge from our existence in relationships. It is out of relationships that we foster our vocabularies, assumptions, and theories about the nature of the world (including ourselves)" (p.13). Relationships form the substance for change: with conversation comes reevaluation; with reevaluation comes inquiry; with inquiry comes reflection: with reflection comes opportunity; with opportunity comes conversation. The key to social constructionism, then, is to refrain from getting bogged down in *exactness* or *essence*. Perhaps this is why, above all, that Gergen reminded us to retain both humility and curiosity when applying this theory: after all, social constructionism provides us with no finite right or wrong. Instead, we must accept that meanings will change over time, and embrace the cyclical processes the theory embodies and the potential this acceptance unleashes.

Constructionism and Constructivism

It would be difficult to ignore a discussion of constructionism versus constructivism when examining social constructionism's central propositions, as the two theories are oft confused and/or used interchangeably. Indeed, the two share a similar history, with a nod to both Kant and Marx, but can be differentiated based on these distinctions:

Social constructionism has origins in sociology, and, as such, revolves around worlds “made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction” (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 375). Constructivism, on the other hand, is rooted in psychology. In an introduction to Vygotsky's *Mind in Society*, editors Cole and Scribner (1978) wrote, “In stressing the social origins of language and thinking, Vygotsky was following the lead of influential French sociologists, but to our knowledge he was the first modern psychologist to suggest the mechanisms by which culture becomes a part of each person's nature” (p. 6). With Vygotsky, along with fellow psychologists Piaget and Bruner, shaping the tenets of constructivism, the easiest distinction one could make is that the constructivism and constructionism descend from different fields of study.

Theoretically, constructivism revolves around “individual cognitive processes” (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 379) in *addition* to “the active creation and modification of thoughts, ideas, and understandings as the result of experiences that occur within socio-cultural contexts” (Doolittle and Hicks, 2003, p. 76). As such, it embodies these six principles, according to Doolittle and Hicks (2003):

- Principle 1: The construction of knowledge and the making of meaning are individually and socially active processes.

- Principle 2: The construction of knowledge involves social mediation within cultural contexts.
- Principle 3: The construction of knowledge is fostered by authentic and real-world environments.
- Principle 4: The construction of knowledge takes place within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge and experience.
- Principle 5: The construction of knowledge is integrated more deeply by engaging in multiple perspectives and representations of content, skills, and social realms.
- Principle 6: The construction of knowledge is fostered by students becoming self-regulated, self-mediated, and self-aware. (pp. 82-85)

Doolittle and Hicks (2003) also noted: "An essential goal of education is the development of autonomous individuals capable of directing their own lives effectively" (p. 85).

Constructivism can, at times, also be distinguished from constructionism in its dual emphasis on both the social process *and* the autonomy of the individual.

Here's the catch: constructivism, in *practice*, runs the gamut from radical constructivism (truth is unknowable) to cognitive constructivism (truth can be known), with social constructivism landing squarely in the relative and subjective middle and, as such, sharing many similarities with social constructionism (Doolittle and Hicks, 2003, pp. 77-78). Of social constructivism, Doolittle and Hicks (2003) wrote, "truth is adaptive and socially determined meaning" begotten from dialogue between people (p. 79). They also noted: "Social constructivism, like radical constructivism, shares the world view that an individual cannot come to know ontological reality in any meaningful way" (p. 79). On a practical level, in terms of both epistemology and ontology, social constructivism indeed sounds much like

social constructionism, and I frequently employ the principles of social constructivism in the classroom. For the purposes of this research, however, the suppleness of social constructionism, supported by Marx and Mannheim's views of consciousness and ideology, lends itself recursively not only to the formation, interpretation, and sharing of knowledge, but to the diffusion of ideology as well. In this manner, myths are produced, probed, *and* pulled apart.

A Framework for Research

In their application of social constructionism to educational leadership, examining constructions of gender in positions of authority in schools in North Carolina, McFadden and Smith (2004) stated, "Who we are as individuals is intertwined with and inseparable from who we are collectively as a society" (p. 24). In the introduction to his book applying social constructionism to social work, Witkin (2012) wrote:

Humans cannot live alone. To envision human life is to envision relationships. Our beliefs and feelings, what we find pleasing or displeasing, beautiful or ugly, right or wrong, are all products of social relationships. This, in a nutshell is the guiding principle of social construction. (p. 1)

Many, many authors have applied the tenets of social constructionism to studies related to educational inquiry. What, then, makes this theory so useful, in particular? As is immediately evident in McFadden and Smith and Witkin's works, the initial emphasis is on relationships; in the arena of education, relationships, in turn, become the catalyst for transformative dialogue, an intentional shift in teaching approaches, an emphasis on collaboration within the classroom, and, at times, even value-driven action.

Relationships

Education is inherently a social endeavor, and one of the primary relationships in education is that of teacher to student, an association which can make or break a student-to-content or student-to-society connection. After all, as Dewey (1897) wrote, “Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends” (p. 35). In terms of relationships in the school arena, Gergen (2015) believed that the “potentials are profound” (p. 149). Consider the alternative: as Gergen (2015) pointed out, “From a constructionist standpoint, in creating a desirable world together, we simultaneously produce an alternative world of the less than desirable. For everything in which we place value, there is also a negative exterior, the non-valued” (p. 121). To avoid pitting ourselves against each other and eschew binary thinking in the classroom and within the school, it is *crucial* that we exercise our abilities to foster and maintain multiple relationships and dialogues within the education environment. As a community college, MCC revolves around relationships (and the spirit of collegiality), and sharing the knowledge each department has regarding the students they serve seemed like a perfect place to begin.

Dialogue and the Construction of Knowledge

Indeed, if one of the most critical tasks of education is to educate, how does the construction of knowledge take place within the classroom? King (1994) observed, “Most of what transpires in today’s college classrooms is based on the outdated transmission model of teaching and learning; the professor lectures and students take notes, read the text, memorize the material, and regurgitate it later on the exam” (p. 15). King therefore maintained that

“knowledge cannot be transmitted from one person to another in such a passive manner” (pp. 15-16). Thankfully, there’s a solution: A dialogic classroom, in particular, can shift the dynamic between student and teacher and student-to-material. When the teacher becomes a guide, facilitator, or coach, students can become teachers in their own rights, too. When the teacher “stands down,” and steps away from the lectern, student voices are heard in the classroom. With a teacher who is listening, responding, and engaging students in dialogue, the classroom conversation becomes a place where knowledge is constructed, rather than transmitted. In addition, transformative dialogue can shape the way faculty view the world, too, and offer alternative perspectives. As Gergen (2015) pointed out, transformative dialogue allows participants to construct “worlds together, as opposed to separately” (p. 135). Palmer (2010) questioned, in regard to “open, honest, and intentional” conversations, “If such conversations can help spark a civil rights movement, how could they not help spark educational reform? The university may be slow to change, but surely is not as intransigent as American racism” (p. 127). Accordingly, we can “co-create new ways of understanding, new traditions of relating, and new forms of life” (Gergen, 2015, p. 28). At MCC, our established relationships (fostered under a spirit of collegiality) can open the door for honest dialogue and the exploration of new ways of knowing.

Putting Relationships and Dialogue into Practice

It is long-perpetuated myth-perceptions, in particular, that are crying out for attention at MCC. Therefore, let us return to the examination of current constructions regarding developmental education. Nealon and Giroux (2012) defined ideology as “something that’s false or misleading because it’s mystifying” (p. 94). Similarly, Koch (2005) described a “myth” as “a theoretical construction, whose theoretical character, and implicit openness, has

been lost” (p. 129). He cautioned, “myths operate through a selective interpretation of the facts” (p. 129). Marx and Engels (1939) were more forthright when they deemed ideology a “putrescence of the absolute spirit” (p. 3). The mystery, the mystical, the pure *stench* of these notions comes from the blind assumption that they are correct and infallible. Koch (2005) emphasized, “A society governed by myth is not an open society. A myth is above question. It is accepted as foundational truth that cannot be challenged” (p. 129). Taking what we now know about social constructionism, how exactly can a myth be reasoned with?

To apply social constructionism as a framework for analysis, we must return to Gergen’s (2015) “seesaw dynamic” (p. 53); this marks the very pliability and suppleness of this theory. Nealon and Giroux (2012) noted: “If ideology is a kind of study of ideas, the unmasking of a misleading metaphysical abstraction behind the concrete realities, it necessarily remains a part of any culture” (p. 95). Nealon and Giroux continued, “In fact, ideology seems inseparable in this way from the definition of knowledge itself, which is necessarily both abstract and concrete” (p. 95). In this way, ideology is both necessary *and* notorious. On one end of the seesaw we have current constructions of the term “developmental education”; on the other end, we have the disrupting force of dialogue.

In a similar way, prevailing constructions totter back and forth with ideology critique. Haslanger (2012) described ideology critique as a way to focus “on the conceptual and narrative frameworks that we employ in understanding and navigating the world, especially the social world” (Haslanger, 2012, p. 17). Nealon and Giroux (2012) wrote, “for there to be any knowledge at all, there has to be ideology in this sense; there has to be some preexisting agreement concerning what will count as knowledge, or what criteria will be used to judge new or developing knowledges” (p. 96). The following, however, is a crucial point

to understand regarding ideology critique: in this sense, “ideology is a descriptive (rather than prescriptive) word” (Nealon & Giroux, 2012, p. 96). Haslanger (2012) also shared this distinction that she credited to Elizabeth Anderson: “A critique of concept is not a rejection of that concept, but an exploration of its various meanings and limitations. One way to expose the limitations of a concept is by introducing new concepts that have different meanings but can plausibly contend for some of the same uses” (as cited in Haslanger, 2012, p. 17). The goal of ideology critique is not to antagonize, as Haslanger (2012) cautioned: “‘ideology,’ in the intended sense, is not a pejorative term. It is an essential part of any form of social life because it functions in the background that we assimilate and enact in order to navigate our social world” (p. 18). In other words, ideology critique creates a space for alternative or additional understandings without pointing fingers. Therefore, at MCC, we could use our established relationships to foster intentional dialogue that created not only a space for listening and understanding but also a starting point for action.

Conversation Leads to Collaboration

An enormously positive outcome of dialogue is collaboration. Palloff and Pratt (2001) noted, “Whereas years ago instructors viewed their students as ‘blank slates’ whose minds could be filled with the information they were imparting,” a collaborative classroom would conversely “yield deeper levels of knowledge creation” (p. 3). Gergen (2015) attributed this deepening to the priority “placed *on sharing knowledge among students*” (p. 153). Collaboration comes in many forms, and can be implemented not only in the classroom, but system wide throughout the educational arena. For instance, when a leader decides to “actively participate in the flow” of an organizational *conversation*, “the emphasis shifts from individual traits to processes of collaboration, empowerment, dialogue, horizontal

decision making, sharing, distribution, networking, continuous learning, and connectivity” (Gergen, 2015, p. 199). As such, “relational leading” takes center stage, placing primary emphasis on relationships, attention to the process, and opportunities for innovation (Gergen, 2015, p. 200). Here it is easy to see how our established relationships and dialogue could also lead to a desire to *do something* about a current issue, such as those faced at MCC.

Collaboration Prompts Action

Correspondingly, collaboration can also lead to action. Returning to the subject of value, Gergen (2015) noted, “For the constructionist, the aim of research is to interpret, construct, and/or change the world in a valued direction” (p. 66). How does changing the world fit in with education? Research, reflection and action ratchet dialogue up a notch in a call for attention and consideration, crying out “Notice me! Notice me!” In the realm of “language conventions, everyday conversation, and social institutions,” Gergen (2015) referred to a continuous shift in contexts as that “seesaw dynamic” between forces that stabilize and disrupt our constructions of the world (p. 53). Because social constructionism allows us “to see the utility in all ways of life, and to be both appreciatively curious and critical” (Gergen, 2015, p. 32), it is important to be open to the idea of change and to accept this convergence of forces not as something to be dismissed or ignored, but rather, as an invitation for further conversation. As such, the opportunities at MCC are ripe for transformation. After all, in a community of interaction this is what unfolds: relationships allow individuals to form a bond that leads to dialogue that leads to collaboration; in this manner, education and social constructionism have a symbiotic relationship, tethered by the desire to better understand the processes of teaching and learning in our commonsense construction of knowledge.

Collaboration and Action Lead to Practice

Applying ideology critique to social constructionism also paves the way for *practice*. It is not, after all, an analysis that ends with mere identification of ideology, but instead allows for the dominant idea to then be nudged, explored, and even re-conceptualized. Haslanger (2012) emphasized that it isn't enough to determine the truth relative to one party. Instead, the two sides must "continue to engage until they reach a mutually acceptable common ground" (p. 425). An advantage of this, Haslanger noted, "is that it would help make sense of the idea that ideology critique is transformative" (p. 425). The first step for this is recognizing the construction, which is easier said than done. After all, as Nealon and Giroux (2012) cautioned: "the more misty the explanation, one might say, the more ideological it is; the more an explanation appeals to an unexamined 'common sense' that can't be interrogated, the more it is dependent on 'ideology'" (p. 101). Then, we must seek alternative perspectives to ply the boundaries of the dominant definition, putting dialogue, collaboration, and conversation into play. The goal of this, as Haslanger (2012) concluded, is "not merely a matter of changing beliefs, but of creating social spaces that disrupt dominant schemas. This, I believe, is consistent with the value and the power of consciousness raising" (p. 427). As such, social construction sets the stage for an ideology critique that reveals "the interests, values, doctrines, or political aims that underlie ...seemingly neutral claims to truth" (Gergen, 2015, p. 15), but also provides "vast potentials for co-creating more promising futures" (p. 34). In other words, when the myth gets messy, the fun begins. Most invigoratingly, it seems that sometimes the seesaw effect can level out and invoke instead the principles of yin and yang. Gergen (1994) referred to this leveling as "ideological *emancipation*," and noted, "critical appraisal thus liberates us from the pernicious effects of

mystifying truths” (p. 35). When we embrace these fluctuating forces, then, we just might be able to *do something* about “frozen” notions and myth-perceptions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

We know that teachers are, with students, the heart of the educational process. We know, also, that all sorts of changes and innovations have effectively blocked, ended, or distorted behind the classroom door. But we still persist in asking how we can crash through this blockade — how we can get teachers to adopt the methods and practices we think they should use. Perhaps we should try more seriously to find out what they are doing, and to work cooperatively with them toward perfecting the methods to which they are devoted and in which they reveal their talent... – Nel Noddings (2003)

Headed with the mindfulness social constructionism necessitates, it was time to prepare for phase two of the journey: the time had come to *do something* about current conceptions of students either in developmental education or those who bypassed it due to the implementation of Multiple Measures. As such, this research fueled work that was concentrated in the educational setting, Mountain Community College (MCC), where it could have immediate value in the very semester that Multiple Measures was implemented. Using social constructionism as the framework, my qualitative research design centered around the formation of a community of interaction at MCC, signifying the relationships, dialogue, and collaboration of the research participants as well as the actions they generated. In addition, by engaging elements of critical reflection and transformation through the practice of reflective inquiry, this methodology was chosen because it prioritized the process as well as the knowledge shared by the group, and operated unequivocally at the axis of theory and practice. Echoing this emphasis on practice, the following research questions guided the formation of the community of interaction:

- How did a commitment to a broader understanding of students enrolled in or bypassing developmental education shape us, as educators, in light of the implementation of Multiple Measures in the Fall of 2016?
- How was the process of reflection integral to the community of interaction?

A Qualitative Approach

The research methodology was grounded in a qualitative approach; it did not operate in isolation from individuals, and was not constrained, restrained, or designed to be quantified. Rather, qualitative research is dynamic and fluid: because it revolves around interaction with others, it maintains pliability, is dependent on its participants, lives and breathes, and embraces all the “messiness” this type of non-linear research entails. Instead of being measured, then, research is *experienced*; it is conducted with heart, intention, reflection, and in communication with others. Rubin and Rubin (1995) emphasized this need for experiential learning within qualitative research when they wrote: “Should the work be primarily objective; that is, should it start out with broad theories and suppositions and then systematically test their implications? *Or* should it be inductive; that is, should it build explanations from the ground up, based on what is discovered?” (p. 15). Correspondingly, it was imperative that the relational research I conducted took place in the field, where perspectives could be gathered and extended through conversation, observation and interaction with people as we were seeing and *doing together*. For these reasons, I desired to be working together, face-to-face and side-by-side, with other instructors in a community of interaction that was dependent on dialogue, involvement, interdependence, reflection, and the sharing of knowledge.

Action Research

In keeping with the tenets of social constructionism, this type of community of interaction has no finite finish line; instead, it begins with an idea and spirals outward. As it happens, this intentional type of qualitative inquiry is tailor made for action research. Discussing the relevance of social constructionism today, Gergen (2015) noted, “Although

the basic ideas of social construction are highly general, the chief focus is on practice” (p. xi). In addition, Gergen proposed that researchers ask this initial question when considering action research: “Can these ideas be put to use in practical ways?” (p. xi). Action research is practice in action. In fact, McNiff (2013) called action research “living the theory in action” (p. 51). Because action research is about *living, breathing, and doing the work*, it breaks down barriers between questions and knowledge, teachers and students, planning and implementation, reflection and response, and theory and practice. McNiff (2013) also wrote, “Action research is about putting ideas into action, not just talking about them,” and continued, “Knowing becomes a real-life practice; the boundaries between theory and practice dissolve and fade away” (p. 51). In action research, as in social constructionism, the emphasis is always on the *process*.

In addition, the history of action research dovetailed with my desires to form a community of interaction. For example, Noffke (1997) credited John Collier’s work as one of the “first identifiable starting points” for action research, based on his work to establish a sense of community with Native Americans in his role as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the 1930s and 40s (as cited in McNiff, 2013, p. 56). Also frequently credited is Kurt Lewin’s work in the late 1940s and -50s in the United States, likely because he developed a theory of action research for use at work in industries and organizations that involved a “series of steps involving planning, fact-finding (or reconnaissance), and execution” (as cited in McNiff, 2013, p. 56). Lewin’s series of steps – these *interactions* -- have continued to evolve over time as they are used by communities and within businesses. In fact, when viewed as an iterative system, action research represents a continuous practice of communication, collaboration, and action. McNiff (2013) described this cycle as a “spontaneous, self-creating

system of enquiry” and, as such, did “not see the process as sequential or necessarily rational” (p. 67). Here we see just how closely action research aligns with both the research design and its theoretical framework of social constructionism: because the system of interaction she envisioned was constantly unfolding and folding “into new versions of itself,” McNiff characterized this type of action research as being “constantly in a state of balance within disequilibrium” (p. 67). In this respect, action research and social constructionism share an epistemology. Social constructionism never ends: it never bows to Truth or stops creating new meaning; it is always in continuation. Similarly, action research is ever evolving in reaction to that which surrounds and informs it, and researchers and theorists find themselves continuously engaged in a seesaw dynamic between meaning and change and the shift of meaning and change. Although all research typically spirals outward, action research, in particular, subsumes the solution as part of the process, and operates in perpetual motion. Clearly, this living, breathing research, with its emphasis on community and hearty embrace of change, was just the fluid, dynamic, spiraling approach necessary to embrace the “mess” (or rather, complication) that is at the heart of theoretical research comingled with practice.

Action Research as Advocacy

Excitingly for pr(act)itioners, because action research is continuous and embraces both theory and practice, it can be used to produce and inform change. Coughlan and Brannick (2014) described action research’s goals as two-fold: “to solve a problem” and “contribute theory to a body of knowledge” (p. 48). Seen in this light, and drawing on its origins as an approach to connecting people to action and transforming participants in the process, action research has close ties to advocacy. For instance, Kemmis translated Lewin’s industrial work to the educational arena, and considered action research to be “the sayings,

doings, and relatings” of people in “ecologies of practice” (as cited in McNiff, 2013, p. 63).

Freire (2000), too, emphasized the importance of research in and among people through participatory action research, and made clear the links between dialogue and critical thinking; he wrote:

Finally, true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. (p. 92)

Both Kemmis’ and Freire’s works point toward action research’s ideals regarding transformation and community. For example, according to Marrow and Torres (2002), Freire believed that “transformative action [could] be carried out only by participants who construct their own collective learning process as part of changing their relationship to the social world” (p. 16). Hand in hand with this transformation is self-awareness which is dependent on and generated through the act of reflection. McNiff (2013) touched on this when she emphatically stated, “Critical self-reflection is central” (p. 23). From its emancipatory roots in the 1970s, action research saw a resurgence in the 1980s, sparked, in part, by Schön’s principles of reflective practice. Tying reflection, action, and practice together, Schön (1983) noted, “When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context” (p. 68). The emphasis is on the actions created in concert with community. Propelled by a need to *do* something, then, from Collier and Lewin we inherited a spiraling process that mimics social constructionism’s emphasis on communication, collaboration, and action.

Embracing the additional priorities of self-awareness, reflection, and transformation, courtesy of Schön and Freire, we encounter a full-bodied, participatory approach to research that also happens to keep our feet firmly planted on the ground at the axis of theory and practice.

Insider Action Research

Inherent in most qualitative research is the question of involvement. For instance, how could I tiptoe along that tightrope walk of researcher and participant while I was both directly involved as a community member *and* as an employee and administrator at the very institution where the research was being conducted? Reassuringly, because action research places participants at the heart of the action, I, as the researcher, no longer had to stand on the outside looking in. Noffke and Somekh (2011) referenced this viewpoint when they noted that action research is “research *from inside*” that is “carried out either by the participants themselves or researchers working in collaboration with them” (p. 94). Referring specifically to this perspective as “insider action research,” Coghlan and Brannick (2014) acknowledged a particular audience in their writing: “This book is addressed to the reader who is in this dual role of simultaneously holding an organizational functional role that is linked to a career path and ongoing membership of the organization” as well as a “researcher role for the duration of the research project” (p. xv). Seen in this light, assuming the role of an insider action researcher was heartening to me because I realized that I was utterly unable to disentangle myself from the research at hand, and I knew that I could not stand separate from the action. This very entangling, as it turns out, could even be a beneficial part of the process. As Noffke and Somekh (2011) noted: “In most cases, it [action research] involves a collaborative process that transcends distinctions between researcher(s) and subject(s)” (p.

94). Understanding that my involvement was not only necessary but beneficial made it clear that I had to immerse myself in the community of interaction for the good of the project.

However, while I found comfort in embracing this duality as both insider and outsider, I realized that insider action research also evoked accountability: what would happen, for instance, if the research was not conducted? What would happen if I chose to steer the course of our sessions rather than allowing the community, as a whole, to dictate decisions? The pressure to conduct a successful research project, therefore, weighed heavily on me, and I found myself continuously exploring the complex roles I held as both insider and researcher. Admittedly, too, at times this entanglement with the research process was illusory, due to my administrative position within the department. As chair of the department of Developmental Studies at MCC, I was at the time of the study and continue to be clearly vested in student success. At times this was okay: McNiff (2013) noted, “Doing action research means you consciously hope that something is going to change. You take action to try to let the change happen, and possibly influence it” (p. 96). However, I also held and continue to hold a position of authority within the department. As McNiff (2013) cautioned, “At this point, you need to carefully consider your motives in wishing to take action” (p. 96). While I *was* an insider collaboratively working with participants to shape changes on our campus, I remained an outsider in charge of a department and faculty, some of whom, in fact, participated in the study. Therefore, in addition to carefully examining my multiplicity of roles within the research, action research itself also served to hold my feet to the fire: due to the accountability it demands, research conducted from the inside is not an excuse for research to be conducted wantonly or selfishly because it is deeply grounded in reflection, action, and transformation. In addition, framing the work within social constructionism paved

the way for research that was conducted with integrity by way of a transparent, reflexive, and collaborative group process grounded in intention and responsive to the community of interaction.

The Research Process

As circuitous as action research may seem, a method often emerges from the madness. McNiff (2013) described the basic process of action research this way:

We review our current practice; identify an aspect we wish to investigate; ask focused questions about how we can investigate it; imagine a way forwards; try it out, and take stock of what happens; modify our plan in light of what we have found, and continue with the action; evaluate the modified action; and reconsider what we are doing in light of the evaluation. This can then lead to a new action-reflection cycle... (p. 90)

Designing the research sessions around this recursive process allowed me to merge the components of action research with that of data collection; the first step, however, was to form the community of interaction by identifying participants through intentional sampling. Creswell (2012) referred to this as the first of several necessary steps: “In qualitative research, we identify our participants and sites on purposeful sampling, based on people and places that can best help us understand our central phenomenon” (p. 205). After first seeking approval from MCC and then reaching out to purposefully chosen participants, I proceeded to Creswell’s next step, the comprehensive collection of “observations and documents” (p. 205). Concerning this type of data collection, Creswell cautioned: “In qualitative research, our approach relies on general interviews or observations so that we do not restrict the views of participants” (p. 205). For my study, this is where insider action research took center stage; in lieu of interviews, participants and I took part in a community of interaction through

a series of four professional development sessions. These sessions were flexibly designed to be responsive to the modifications inherent to the action research cycle and provided the data to be analyzed.

Locating the Site and Participants

The research was conducted at Mountain Community College (MCC), a mid-sized two-year institution located in North Carolina. The research was limited to faculty from two divisions at MCC. Housed within the division of Academic Success, the departments of Developmental Studies and Academic Related Instruction are supported by an Academic Learning Center, designed to foster student success through one-on-one tutoring, the Writing Center, and the on-campus library. Overall, the Developmental Studies department consists of five full-time instructors (including myself) and approximately a dozen adjuncts on a semester-to-semester basis, and serves an estimated 1800 students per year (MCC Academic Learning Center Coordinator, personal communication, July 21, 2016). Due to the nature of the developmental course design, this department runs between 80-90 courses a semester. Directly across from the single-story Developmental Studies building is the division of Arts and Sciences, MCC's largest division on its main campus, housed in a three-story building with various offshoots designed to contain an ever-burgeoning number of programs, faculty, and staff. This division consists of 65 full-time faculty, utilizes about 120 adjuncts a semester, and teaches approximately half of all course sections offered by the college (MCC Arts and Sciences Dean, personal communication, January 5, 2017). These two divisions were intentionally chosen because they were both directly affected by the implementation of Multiple Measures in the Fall of 2016 at MCC.

Accordingly, the research study employed purposeful sampling in order to effectively reach participants with connectivity to this central issue (Multiple Measures) within these two divisions. Specifically, an invitation [Appendix B] and follow-up request to participate in a series of four professional development sessions revolving around reflective inquiry were emailed to instructors (both full-time and adjunct), faculty chairs, and administrative deans whose programs served first-semester students within the divisions of Arts and Sciences and Academic Success. These professional development sessions were presented as an opportunity to look at the reasons why we teach, to address current issues in the classroom, to brainstorm solutions, and to share best practices to better serve students. Within the invitation, reflective inquiry was described as a process of reflection that leads to self-understanding and student understanding; a problem-solving cycle that addresses curriculum choices, instructional approaches, and current challenges; an opportunity to inform the decisions we make in the classroom on a daily basis; and a series of PD sessions that involves collaborative learning, critical thinking, and creative problem solving. Both the initial invitation and follow-up request indicated that these professional development sessions would support my dissertation research.

From the initial email invitation and follow-up reminder sent to 144 individuals, ten participants registered for the series of sessions through the college's professional development registration system and completed the Informed Consent for Research [Appendix C]. In an even split, five participants were from the division of Academic Success, and five were from Arts & Sciences. This enrollment reflected a wide-range of positions held at MCC, from permanent part-time to 9-month instructor to 12-month instructor to department chair to division dean. All ten participants who initially enrolled in

the study completed the series of sessions. An 11th individual, an adjunct, asked to receive the materials from the sessions but opted not to participate within the community of interaction and therefore provided no data for the study.

Implementing the Research

The four sessions were scheduled for Friday mornings in October through early December during the second half of the Fall 2016 semester. Each session was scheduled for an hour and a half, and participants were required to register for the series of sessions in order to participate. Participation in all four sessions would then provide the members of the community of interaction with a total of six professional development credits (all faculty at MCC are required to complete 12 professional development credits annually). The sessions were spaced 2-3 weeks apart in order to allow participants to respond to the demands of a busy semester as well as benefit from time specifically set aside for reflection at various points during the semester, and wrapped up one week before the official end of the instruction for the fall semester. The sessions were initially designed to employ and respond to the components of insider action research. Though the process described by McNiff reflects a cycle of planning, reflecting, acting, and observing, it was important to keep in mind that there was no need for the process to be sequential, linear or limiting. Accordingly, each session followed a preliminary session plan [Appendix A] which included specific activities related to getting to know one another, settling into the space, and inquiry-related questions, and was created to be fluid and flexible in order to remain responsive to the needs, moods, directives, and requests of participants.

Reflective Inquiry

Because this iterative cycle of action research necessitated transformation and reflection within a community of interaction that was built upon relationships, dialogue, collaboration, and action, it was clear that these professional development sessions needed to be built upon rich and substantive content. For the session design, I turned to Henderson and Gornik's (2007) transformative curriculum leadership (TCL). TCL seeks to foster "curriculum-based teaching judgments through responsible professional autonomy, and this more sophisticated judgment is embedded in fundamental changes at the personal, interpersonal, and societal levels" (p. 63). Specifically, before instructors can change their teaching, they need to look at themselves and their practice by way of reflective inquiry. In this way, they are then better equipped to nurture the practice of reflection in their students. Correspondingly, Rodgers described reflective inquiry as "a meaning-making cycle," and "a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking," that "needs to happen in community, in interaction with others" (as cited in Henderson & Gornik, 2007, p. 67). After all, in keeping with the tenets of social constructionism and ideology critique, as much as we desire transformation for students, we must first analyze ourselves and our closely-held beliefs, listen to multiple perspectives, and be open to change, too. Similar to the best practices for assessment advocated by Boylan and others within the field of developmental education (Boylan, 2009; Boylan & Fowler, 2010), this approach to self-awareness was designed to provide a more holistic understanding of ourselves both personally and professionally as educators. According to TCL, this understanding, then, could be cultivated through reflective inquiry, which I defined for the course participants as the practice of posing questions to prompt reflection.

Henderson and Gornik (2007) referred to reflective inquiry as multidimensional because the approach required educators to examine issues connected to education (such as curriculum choices and classroom conversations) from varying points of view. Although they also indicated that there “is no precise protocol for reflective inquiry” (p. 65) they provided specific sets of questions which scaffold a “journey of understanding” (p. 70) for educators by way of a reflective inquiry map. For the purposes of this study, I selected four of the seven domains within the map in order to facilitate reflection. As such, these sets of questions provided a practical starting point for the professional development design:

- **Session 1: Reflective Poetic Inquiry:** *examining what we do*
- **Session 2: Reflective Disciplinary Inquiry:** *analyzing curriculum and classroom practices*
- **Session 3: Reflective Critical Inquiry:** *addressing community*
- **Session 4: Reflective Multiperspective Inquiry:** *ensuring that all are heard*

Each session’s design then revolved around a specific line of inquiry as proposed by Henderson and Gornik (2007). For example, in the first session, I planned to have us start by looking at our journeys as educators, using the set of Reflective Poetic Inquiry questions to prompt participants to consider their initial reasons for entering the teaching profession, followed by a comparison and contrast of the values and beliefs initially held versus currently held. We would also take time during the session to calculate our combined teaching experience and to discuss the concept of teaching-as-a-calling. Finally, at the end of the session, I hoped we would be able to transition from looking back to looking forward by grounding our journey through the writing of short- and long-term goals as well as a short, 6-word mission statement. While each of the four sessions was initially designed to incorporate

the reflective inquiry content as a launching pad for discussion, the lesson plans remained loose enough to allow plenty of time for the unscripted ebb and flow demanded by action research within a community of interaction. In this manner, the session designs left plenty of room for “imagining a way forward” as well as the “modification of plans,” imperative components of the action research process (McNiff, 2013). While I needed to begin with a plan in mind, I also anticipated and hoped that the plans would quickly change based on the preferences of the participants.

Collecting Data

Concerning collected data, Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) noted, “Qualitative researchers collect descriptive – narrative and visual – nonnumerical data to gain insights into the phenomena of interest” (p. 366). They elaborated, “Observations, interviews, questionnaires, phone calls, personal and official documents, photographs, recordings, drawings, journals, e-mail messages and responses, and informal conversations are all sources of qualitative data” (p. 366). For the purposes of this study, I collected the following descriptive data at each of the four sessions: audio recordings of the entire session which I later transcribed (including audience reactions or non-verbal responses), an observation guide that recorded seating arrangements and observable behaviors, attitudes, or reactions, and photographs of ideas/thoughts generated collectively as a group and written on whiteboards to ensure that this non-verbal data was collected and included in the transcriptions of the sessions. On the “off” weeks between sessions, I collected anonymous comments, questions, reflections, and requests provided in response to survey questions or prompts such as “What have you been reflecting on this week?” Throughout the semester, I gathered email correspondence that related to the research. Finally, throughout the entire research process, I

also maintained a journal that included a timeline of events occurring on campus and detailed the research process from proposal to completion as well as unexpected ramifications of the research that occurred in early January, prior to the start of the spring semester. While the journal and email correspondence were used to structure or provide detail for the preface and postscript to the collective profile generated in Chapter 4, the transcripts, data from the photographs and observation guides, and survey responses were assembled chronologically, according to session, in order to start the meaning-making process. All of the varying data from Session 1 and the post-session survey for Session 1 were grouped together, followed by all of the data from Session 2 and its survey, and so on. In order to begin recognizing themes for analysis, it was necessary to first accumulate all of the data into one lengthy, diachronic document.

Writing the Data

During the fall semester as well as upon completion of the four sessions, I collected, transcribed, sorted, sifted, read, re-read, reflected, and ruminated over the data generated during the research stage. Because action research emphasizes the *process*, rather than a specific product, and because social construction prioritizes the sharing of knowledge versus an individual cognitive process, the primary goal in sharing the data was not to isolate individual participants, but rather to focus on the collective interaction that took place within the community. Glesne (2006) referred to this organizational technique as an “amalgamation” designed to provide “a descriptive portrait” (p. 183). As Zeni (1998) pointed out in a discussion regarding action research and ethics, a *composite* profile of the research provides additional protection for participants (p. 15) because it does not single out the individuals involved. The caveat to writing a collective portrait of the data, of course, is that

the data can then “be specified, simplified, patterned, and to a large degree stripped of their context” (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 131) for the benefit of the overall design, though Van Maanen (2011) also admitted that “to put a theoretical scheme to work crunching text requires text to first be put in crunchable form” (p. 131). Consequently, the first challenge in writing the data was forming a comprehensive process profile in “crunchable form,” only to then start isolating what was important or necessary in order to begin synthesizing the data. Multiple data-heavy drafts preceded this synthesis of the data that began to emerge based on themes that were repeated from session to session or from survey response to survey response.

Interpreting the Data

After I had written the first long-form draft of the data, I read and reread the material to analyze it for themes or connections. I began with open coding, which Esterberg (2002) defined as “work[ing] intensively with your data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest (p. 158). From this open coding, then, “recurring themes should begin to emerge,” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 159). In order to find these themes, I printed out the long-form draft of the data, noted varying themes, and then sorted the pages according to theme. In this manner, I located themes that arose in multiple sessions or those that tended to consume the community’s time and focus during a single session. After identifying the primary themes, based on their prevalence, I then returned to the computer to sort portions of the data according to these themes. Therefore, the data that is featured in Chapter 4 corresponds with the five main findings that evolved from the themes while duplicate data or themes that merited few occurrences was discarded. As Glesne (2006) noted, “Writing gives form to the researcher’s clumps of carefully categorized and organized

data. It links together thoughts that have been developing through the research process,” (p. 173). Although it may sound simplistic, Glesne (2006) observed that “the act of writing also stimulates *new* thoughts, *new* connections” (emphasis added, p. 173). The reason for this continued emphasis on the *writing* in tandem with the data is that both the analysis and interpretation of the data (finding the *new*) for this study utilized and depended on writing as the primary tool for sense-making. For me, to write is to think, and to think is to write. By beginning with the long-form data and the coding of themes, the composite profile presents a descriptive overview of the sessions and participants, delineates how sessions began to shift when driven by the methodology of action research, and highlights common topics that posed challenges and consumed members’ thoughts.

However, I also realized after writing the comprehensive profile of the *sessions* that readers would still need a better sense of the entire research process in order to connect our localized communal efforts within the larger context related to developmental education that were addressed in Chapters 1 and 2. Therefore, I returned to my field journal in order to construct a preface and postscript for the profile that provide the social and political context of MCC’s campus at the time the research was conducted. Finally, I connected the entire experience, preface, profile, and postscript, to the foundational theory this study was based upon: social constructionism. In this manner, the data and findings were also interpreted through the lens of social constructionism and its tenets of educational inquiry in order to better understand what exactly the community of interaction offered its members and the appeal a community of interaction may have on a larger audience.

Maintaining Integrity

The responsibilities I held toward my participants were demonstrated in multiple ways. Seidman's (2006) work on informed consent speaks to my additional responsibilities toward participants based on the principles outlined in *The Belmont Report*: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (p. 58). Therefore, first and foremost, an informed consent form preceded any participation. This provided protection for participants through the use of pseudonyms, voluntary participation, and the option to quit the study at any time. In addition, as noted above, the data were used to generate a comprehensive process profile, providing extra protections to participants. Instead of isolating participants on an individual journey, the focus was on the community of interaction and the collective findings that emerged from this shared relationship. Third, emphasizing my priorities of confidentiality and the collective process both verbally and in written form helped to establish a safe space during sessions. For example, participants were invited to share only what they felt comfortable sharing with the group or with partners; they could base their responses on the reflective inquiry questions that guided each session, but I did not collect their individual written responses to these guiding questions. In this manner, participants could safeguard their responses, if desired, and maintain authority over what they wanted to share. Fourth, I took on the role of moderator, at times, during the sessions to ensure that all who wanted to speak or had something to share were heard by the group. For instance, after Session 1, I realized it was important to the group to ensure that the period set aside for reflection was truly quiet. In addition, at times I intervened to thwart discussions dominated by one or two participants, or to move the discussion along because we were running out of time. I was always available to chat with participants before and after sessions for anything they wanted to share personally

or confidentially. Fifth, although the design of each session varied, there were these intentional similarities: Based on the results of the first survey, each session featured quiet time for personal reflection, facilitated dialogue between two to three individuals (groupings were often randomized so that everyone had the opportunity to interact with everyone else), and group activities in written or spoken form (participants generated lists on white boards, for instance, or responded verbally to questions posed to the group). Not only was it important to the process that everyone was heard, but it was important that we heard from all participants in a form they felt comfortable employing. Opportunities for dialogue were interwoven between large-group and small-group setups. Sixth, post- and pre-session surveys allowed participants to provide anonymous feedback, questions, and suggestions to me about past or upcoming sessions, and these responses dictated future session designs.

That said, my insider and outsider positioning definitely put extra demands on maintaining the integrity of the research. As Grover (2004) noted: “While framing research as ‘collaborative’ may help reduce the power imbalance, it does not hide the fact that... one party is investigating the other” (as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2014, Who’s the Writing For? section, para. 3). For instance, the ethical considerations created by the power dynamics inherent in this research, such as my position at the college and my duality as both researcher and participant, were of paramount importance to attend to and acknowledge. Accordingly, Herr and Anderson (2014) stressed the importance of considering the participants and the need to reduce the possible risks to them while maximizing the benefits of the research (Moving Beyond Do No Harm section, para. 1). Because I held and continue to hold a position of authority at the college and because I was unable to unravel myself from the research, I needed to be extremely mindful when negotiating my positionality as a researcher

with that of my role as an employee, supervisor, and co-worker at MCC. Although I was officially listed as the provider of the professional development opportunity, I strove to de-emphasize my role during the sessions while prioritizing the importance of our communal actions and dialogue. For example, for the first session, I suggested small-group activities that led to whole-group discussion. In addition, after the first session, and between subsequent sessions, participants were encouraged to provide suggestions, questions, and criticism for what they liked, disliked, or wanted more of during sessions. In this manner, the session design began to take shape due to the input of all community members. That is not to say, however, that negotiating my positionality within the group was always easy. Most often, it was not. I felt a great deal of responsibility toward the project as a whole, and felt so much pressure after Session 1 that I ended the session with an ocular migraine, the first I've ever had. Additionally, I often wondered if I should have spent more time listening, rather than contributing: did my input allow us to move ahead or did it dictate the conversation in some way? Did they really want to hear from me, anyway? At other times, the sessions felt dependent on a concept from the original session design or reflective inquiry questions to move us ahead. In truth, functioning as both researcher and participant meant that my awareness was often in hyperdrive, second-guessing was second-nature, and my emotions swung the pendulum from ecstatic to wary; I was constantly unsettled.

Quality and Trustworthiness

In addition to carefully attending to this power dynamic at play within insider research, I was aware that it was important to pay attention to quality, trustworthiness, and reflexivity. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) provided definitions for these four criteria as follows: *transferability* relates to the rich, thick description of the project research that allows readers

to identify with the research site and interactions. The authors note, “qualitative researchers should include as much detail as possible so others can see the setting for themselves” (p. 375). I relied on the candid, raw, (and admittedly, sometimes panicked) voice of my journal entries to compile the preface and postscript, as well as the process profile itself.

Transferability is also evidenced throughout this report through my writing style; in writing this piece, I assumed that the attentive reader was a confidant who could identify with an educator’s genuine voice and desire to improve her workplace. In addition, Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) specified that *dependability* and *authenticity* (authenticity = credibility) relate to the solidity of the data, verified through the application and overlap of methods, practiced over an extended period of time in an effort to address problems “not easily explained” and to ensure that different viewpoints are represented (pp. 375-376). In this study, I used multiple data collection methods (observations, audio recordings, surveys, journal entries, and observation guides) to achieve dependability and authenticity within the environment of a living, breathing community college campus, reflected both in the timeline of events and in reaction to the implementation of Multiple Measure in North Carolina. Finally, Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) noted that *confirmability* relates to an analysis of “underlying assumptions or biases” (p. 377). Confirmability, in particular, was an ongoing issue of primary importance for me, perhaps in order to help sooth my unsettled sense-of-self as researcher and participant, and, for this reason, I found I relied heavily on reflexivity.

Reflexivity

Rubin and Rubin (1995) touched on the act of reflectiveness when they noted that researchers, “rather than deny that they influence what they are studying, monitor the impact they have. They are active participants in research; their personalities, their knowledge, their

curiosity, and their sensitivity all impact the quality of their work” (p. 17). In addition to leading sessions that revolved around reflective inquiry, the very act of asking questions to prompt reflection, I had to hold myself accountable to hard questions related to the entire process, my role in the research, and the results of the research. Was I allowing the community to guide the research? Was I providing enough input while avoiding too much input? Were members of the community benefiting from our interactions? Was their safety in our community? Were responses honest or guarded? This resulted in multiple layers of reflection that I found easiest to process initially through the act of writing, while transcribing the audio recordings, for instance, or while recording emotional responses, secret fears, prayers, joys, medical ailments, responses of relief, pressures, stresses, and other concerns or notions in the research journal, and while writing out the preface, postscript, process profile, and findings. Following this there was a second level of reflection, however, and this type of reflection was not achieved on the fly, such as a teacher reacts to student needs in the classroom, but was attained instead by holding space for the research in my thoughts on an ongoing basis. Reflection while writing is a recursive process for me: the more I write, the more I think, and the more I reflect; the more I reflect, the more I learn; the more I learn, the more I write or rewrite. For example, during the analysis and interpretation phases, I deliberated, hesitated, planned, typed, read, reread, edited, printed, scribbled, interrogated, cut, pasted, highlighted, castigated, cried, fretted, slept fitfully and explored via my subconscious, rose anew, rewrote, and existed in a state of continual uncomfortableness; to me, this is reflexivity in the zone. In the end, being in the “zone” meant the difference between simply sharing the data and being able to pinpoint specific times during the sessions that truly shifted our collective thinking or proliferated current myths. Pillow (2003) referred

to this type of attentiveness when she wrote: “This vigilance from within can aid in a rethinking and questioning of the assumptive knowledges embedded in reflexive practices in ethnographic and qualitative research” (p. 177). Clearly, this was not gentle probing, but as a critical researcher it was necessary to interrogate my surface or shallow reflections and assumptions. I could not stop by examining or writing what was easy. In addition, due to my duality as an insider and outsider, as researcher and participant, as department chair and session leader, as supervisor and employee, as teacher and student, and as writer and reader, it was imperative that the research reflect a rigorous, ongoing, and uncomfortable inquiry of the data.

Design Rationale

In late 2015, current perceptions regarding students enrolled in developmental education at the community college where I work startled me, and left me pondering what I could *do* to thaw the frozen notions held by colleagues and other instructors on campus. I believed I owed it to students, too, to refute the “preexisting” categories and prevailing perceptions others held regarding developmental education. Was it self-righteous, though, to proclaim that I wanted to help students and then do an about-face by conducting research that only indirectly involved students? Throughout the research process, what I came to realize is that this research approach could ultimately benefit many students (and not just those students who start their academic studies in the Developmental Studies department) through the improved pedagogical practices of campus instructors. After all, as Crotty (1998) stated, “Conscientisation is a ‘joint project.’ It takes place in human beings among other human beings” (p. 153). In addition, Freire believed that “the educator is the students’ partner as they engage together in critical thinking and a quest for mutual humanization” (as cited in

Crotty, 1998, p. 153). Did it make sense to tackle this fear of students through faculty dialogue, collaboration, and action in a community of interaction? If I am truly honest, the area of research that I desired to focus on most for this research involved working with fellow faculty, in terms of pedagogy and professional development, in order to enhance our collective ability to teach all students.

In choosing to work with faculty, the task before me was to negotiate the space between the merely active and the “merely cerebral” (Crotty, 1998, p. 151). Ultimately, Crotty described critical inquiry today as a “spiralling [*sic*] process” of movement both “forward and upward” and of “reflection and action” (1998, p. 157), reminding us once again that the process itself has value. This is where insider action research came so fittingly into play. McNiff (2013) stated, “[it] is a name given to a particular way of looking at your practice to check whether it is as you feel it should be” (p. 23). In other words, frozen notions at MCC did not reflect reality. As McNiff (2013) also noted, in doing action research “you recognize that you are always in relation with other people, always situated in real-life social, political, economic, and historical context” (p. 24). As such, “Action research is often referred to as “practitioner research” and “it is a form of on-the-job research, undertaken by people in any context” (McNiff, 2013, p. 23). Therefore, due to its on-the-ground, intentional approach to research, grounded in social constructionism, combined with reflective inquiry, and coupled with high standards for researcher integrity, accountability, and reflexivity, insider action research presented the ideal opportunity to craft a praxis that pushed back against current myth-perceptions and allowed us to establish common ground within the context of community.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

I have a hunch that young people today feel profoundly disconnected and alienated from community in its many forms—from human community, to community with nature, to community with things of the spirit... But when we represent human thinking for what I believe it is, which is not a disconnected mechanism but a community-building capacity, then it turns out students want to learn... Great thinking in all fields at its deepest and best is a connective activity, a community-building activity, and not an activity which is meant to distance and alienate us. – Parker Palmer (1993b)

This chapter features findings related to the community of interaction that was formed between the divisions of Academic Success and Arts and Sciences at Mountain Community College (MCC) and fostered through four professional development sessions conducted on campus between October – December 2016. The findings emerged slowly over the course of multiple drafts in order to make meaning out of a large amount of data (transcripts, observation guides, documentation of activities, survey responses, and my personal journal of the research process). By using open coding, common themes emerged from the data that either overlapped multiple sessions or consumed a great deal of participants' discussions or thoughts outside of sessions. These common themes led to five collective findings. By connecting the data to the findings through a comprehensive process profile, individual participants were protected, and the focus of the project remained on the community of interaction that was formed. In addition, by analyzing the data through the lens of social constructionism, we can easily see how these five findings fit within social constructionism's tenets of educational inquiry.

Because the impetus for this research study was initially based on faculty reactions to North Carolina's *Multiple Measures for Placement Policy* (Multiple Measures), and the research itself was timed to begin alongside the mandatory implementation of Multiple Measures at the start of the Fall 2016 semester, it was necessary to bookend this process

profile with a preface and postscript that touch on events that occurred at MCC around the time that the research was conducted. After all, “Paying attention to the social contexts in which stories are told” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 152) can help researchers frame the data that has been collected. These short sketches of events provide an overview of the research journey and necessary context for the process profile. As Esterberg (2002) also noted, “In qualitative research, data analysis is a *process* of making meaning” (emphasis added, p. 152). Denzin described this type of analysis as “a creative process, not a mechanical one” (as cited in Esterberg, 2002, p. 152); St. Pierre (2005) called it a “seductive and tangled method of discovery” (as cited in Richardson & St. Pierre, p. 967) In the end, the comprehensive profile shared here provides an overview of the community of interaction, describes the commonalities we discovered, delineates how sessions shifted in response to member requests, conceptualizes the meaning of “community,” and depicts the shared actions of the community.

Preface to the Profile

August – October 2016

For some reason, I had assumed that gaining permission to conduct professional development sessions at MCC would be the easy part of the research process in early August. However, pitching the idea didn’t go quite as well as I expected; I think part of the problem was that the professional development department had scheduled the meeting with me so that I could give them input on *their* ideas for professional development (PD), rather than suggest my own. In hindsight, I should have prefaced the meeting with an “Hey, I have an idea, too!” instead of surprising them with it at the meeting. Over the course of the meeting, I did learn two items of interest: first, the Arts and Sciences (A&S) division was already working on

their own PD for “first semester students”; secondly, this new term, “first semester students,” (which I had not heard before on campus) was being used by the A&S division to describe the students who would likely have previously tested into developmental education coursework.

As August progressed, I was revved up for the start of the semester in the midst of navigating a brand-new position (chair of the department of Developmental Studies) and problem solving on behalf of students and faculty. Halfway through Day 1, I received an email from the individual in A&S who was in charge of the First Semester Students PD for the division for the 2016-2017 school year, and they invited me to speak at one of their monthly meetings (A&S personnel, personal communication, August 15, 2016). My first thought was “Why weren’t *we*, the individuals who work with these students all the time, more involved in this PD opportunity from the get go?” I was, however, still thankful to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Developmental Studies department, and scheduled my speech for the end of the A&S division meeting in early September.

I spent the weekend prior to this division meeting in September fine-tuning and rehearsing what I was going to say during the 10 or so minutes I had been allotted. At our most recent Developmental Studies staff meeting in August, I had mentioned that I’d been invited to speak to A&S, and the full-time faculty were pleasantly surprised that A&S was asking for our input. When I asked what they wanted me to be sure to share, one faculty member stated, “Please let them know that we would be happy to have them come over here and observe our classes and see how we work with students” (Developmental Studies instructor, personal communication, August 19, 2016). In fact, having observed both full-time and adjunct Developmental Studies faculty in action over the past few weeks, I had

decided that the basis of my speech would be the best practices I had witnessed thus far in the semester, as I believed that sharing these suggestions could be helpful to others negotiating new student experiences.

Although I was scheduled to speak at 3:45pm, toward the end of the meeting, I arrived shortly after it began and sat in the front of the room. The majority of the meeting was spent discussing the brand-new, mandatory advising duties all full-time A&S faculty were expected to take on this semester, and this discussion went over its intended length of time. By 3:58, I realized I had wasted my time (during the meeting and in preparation), and the individual in charge of putting together the First Semester Students PD turned to me and quietly said, “I think they forgot about you” (A&S personnel, personal communication, September 7, 2016). After the meeting, though, I was able to speak with this same individual at length. They mentioned that they had personally received a great deal of push-back from A&S faculty over the past week due to the requirements for September’s First Semester Students PD. The requirements were to read one article and write two forum posts in response to their colleagues’ posts by the end of the month (A&S personnel, personal communication, September 7, 2016). This individual also mentioned that participation in this First Semester Students PD was required for all A&S faculty. This produced the following realization: Arts & Sciences’ fall semester was *brimming* with newly implemented and mandatory obligations. Not only were they taking on full-time advising in October, in addition to participating in the required PD from September – November for first semester students, but they were also actively teaching more students of varying levels than ever before due to the implementation of Multiple Measures. Add to that the fact that A&S had *also* instituted a new pathways project at the beginning of this semester, designed to

streamline the choices students had about which courses they could or could not take. *All of this made for a full semester of forced participation.*

Frankly, given my new understanding of all that A&S was undertaking, by the time mid-September rolled around I was really concerned about enrollment for the PD that was to be my research. Therefore, I created an email “promo” for recruitment purposes specifically targeted toward 144 individuals from the Academic Success and A&S divisions. In fact, because of the new pathways project that A&S had implemented, it was even easier to narrow down the specific departments currently working with first semester students: Academic Related Instruction, Communications, Developmental English and Reading, Developmental Math, English, Math, Psychology, and Sociology. Consequently, the email invitation (sent September 17) and follow-up reminder to register (sent two weeks later, on September 29) were distributed electronically to all adjunct, full-time faculty, and administrative deans who worked with students in these departments. Because enrollment increased significantly within a few hours of both of these communications being sent, it was clear that recipients received (and read) these communications. By the first week of October, I was relieved to see that ten individuals had enrolled.

The Process Profile

Overview

In early October, ten individuals, in addition to a facilitator (which is how I saw myself, at least at first), came together to try a different way of learning: something called a “community of interaction” that was not mandatory but simply promised participants the opportunity to talk about the work they did on a daily basis at their college. When I arrived for Session 1, the participants had already grouped themselves at three circular tables in the

front of the room, seating themselves according to division: specifically, those in the Academic Success division (including Developmental Math, Developmental English and Reading, and Academic Related Instruction) were seated to the left of the room, with an Academic Success administrator sitting in the middle of the arrangement, followed by those from the division of Arts & Sciences positioned to the right of the room. (The sessions took place within a classroom regularly used for Developmental Studies classes.) As demonstrated by their seating choices, the participants who enrolled in the PD opportunity were evenly split: five individuals were from the division of Academic Success, and five individuals were from the division of Arts & Sciences. The group taking the PD was predominately female and represented part-time regular (1) and full-time faculty (5), department chairs (3), and division deans (1). An 11th individual, an adjunct faculty member, registered for the class and collected the materials from the class; however, this individual's data was not collected as they did not participate in the community of interaction due to a scheduling conflict.

We learned in Session 1 that everyone had their own reason(s) for attending the PD related to improved teaching and instruction, personal growth, supporting a colleague's research, and a desire to set aside time to think. We also discovered that, collectively, we had over 175 years of teaching experience, and that many of us juggled dual responsibilities as both faculty members and administrators. In addition, at least three of us felt strongly that we had been "called" to this career; all of us held definable values, beliefs, and goals related to teaching and our roles as educators. The six-word mission statements that members constructed at the end of Session 1, for a closing "Exit Ticket" activity, reflected each participant's specific goals related to their role in education:

- Believe in my students and colleagues
- Believe, love, be here, push, transform
- Empower students—relevant info—enrich lives
- Empower individuals allay fears grow community
- Inspire all students – Everyone can learn
- Making a difference negating negative voices
- Overcoming obstacles aspiring to lifelong learning
- Passionate teaching, life-long learning, improving lives
- Teaching students to look beyond themselves
- Successful reading and writing: empowered life

The active voice and emphasis on verbs, such as “believe,” “empower,” “inspire,” “aspire,” “improve,” and “make a difference,” in these six-word statements were particularly striking to me when looking at the statements collectively. Though short in length, these statements reflected a deep understanding of the challenges MCC’s students faced and the challenges instructors negotiated regularly. In addition, the eager participation, good humor, curiosity about the material, thoughtful responses, and willingness to get to know one another that we found in Session 1 revealed the fact that all of us took learning very seriously, and this attitude set the tone for subsequent sessions.

Even though we enjoyed our time together, the real world intervened more often than not. In between sessions, post- and pre-session surveys included simple prompts for reflection: “What have you found yourself reflecting on this week?” In their “off” hours, it was clear that community members were devoting a great deal of thinking time toward students regarding ways to keep them motivated, engaged, focused, and on the road to

improvement in the classroom. While the political context of the time demanded at least a portion of their thinking, with respondents also mentioning, “the state of our nation,” “how to stop hate,” and “the voice of the People,” (Post-Session Survey 1, Pre-Session 3 Survey) the responses to the reflective prompt typically fell into one of three categories related to teaching:

Classroom focus. Ruminations that fell into this category included procedures related to grading, specific assignment choices, and late paper policies. They also included approaches to teaching that were within an instructor’s realm of control, including, “exploring additional avenues for course lecture material—encouraging class discussion and bringing in interesting and relevant information about a topic from outside sources” or “incorporating more quizzes and labs into my curriculum course because it seems to keep students in my developmental course on top of the material instead of just working on it right when it is due” (Pre-Session 3 Survey). Another member noted, “I have been reflecting on how to increase the retention rate in one of the most difficult classes that I teach in the semester. I am implementing an optional study session twice a week to reinforce concepts taught during the week” (Pre-Session 3 Survey). Even when members were not in the classroom, it was clear they were still thinking about how to improve the classroom experience.

Student Focus. Closely linked to classroom practices was an overall concern for MCC students themselves. Significantly, directly following our first session, a respondent noted an enlightening shift in thinking that was counterintuitive to their department’s current perspective:

I have been reflecting on how we (faculty in my department) view students (often not in a positive light) and how that impacts our responses to them and how we approach teaching them. As a result, I've decided to work diligently to reframe my view of students...It's not an US against THEM. (Post-Survey Session 1)

Additional reflective responses revealed a desire for answers to other confounding "how-to" questions, including quests to figure out "how to motivate students to get into revision and work toward continual improvement," "how to keep students focused, to keep them from panicking, to listen to advice," "how to help my students develop a value system," "how my students are or are not making the changes I am hoping for," and "how I can adjust the process for better results" (Pre-Session 3 Survey). One respondent noted: "I have been reflecting on what students bring into the classroom from their personal lives. I know I can't be all things to them, but it absolutely impacts the way I teach and interact with them, and I feel that it should" (Pre-Session 3 Survey). This concern for students also jived with something a member shared publically during Session 1 when they stated: "you're going to get your heart broken," in response to a question about what they had learned over their years in education.

The need for more time. In between classroom planning and a prevalent concern for students, members also revealed a desire for more time. One respondent noted, "I need more time to plan. I am thinking about how much better my materials/content would be presented if I could think about the implementation more," while another wrote, "I have been thinking about how I can better plan my days/my work to be more productive without working 10 hours a day. I want to find that sweet spot where I can develop routines and consistency in my day to day work. It is something that has eluded me" (Pre-Session 2 Survey). Echoing

this need was a common refrain that appeared in multiple surveys: “I haven’t had much time for reflection this week” or “Sadly, this week has been swampish so I haven’t found much time for reflection” (Post-Session 1 survey, Pre-Session 3 Survey). These reflections mirrored comments that had been shared with the group during Session 1, when one member commented on what gets in the way of their teaching-as-a-calling: They said, “But everything else... affects my calling quite a bit.” When asked to define “everything else,” the individual indicated they were referring to “anything having to do with the chair stuff,” then elaborated: “But Fridays, like today, I will spend probably a good hour and a half going back through my attendance, emailing students. I don’t want to drop them” (Session 1). “Stuff” and “time” in tandem came up once again when another member shared, “all of this other stuff takes so much more time and takes me away from prepping and my creative slant” (Session 1). These contemplations reflected the fact that members were constantly negotiating between classroom and student needs in addition to extraneous demands on their time. This expenditure of thought (and likely related frustration) was sometimes evident in the fatigue that had settled on members by the beginning of Friday’s sessions, particularly during Sessions 2 and 3. Again, what we found in our “off hours” was that we were more often than not thinking about students.

Over the course of eight weeks, the community reflected a mix of temperaments: Session 1 began at the mid-point of the fall semester, and the mood at the beginning of the class was receptive, warm, inviting, and relaxed. In fact, laughter rang out into the hallway as I approached the classroom door. Our second session, the sleepy, slow-paced one, took place during the 11th week of the semester, and the mood at the start of it was quiet and calm as members were fighting fatigue. Session 3 took place the week following the presidential

elections; some were visibly tired while others seemed more alert. In response to a request for a one- to two-word answer to the question, “What’s the state of *you* right now at this point in the semester?” participants shared the following: exhausted, tired, fragmented, confused, hellaciously overwhelmed, uplifted, surprisingly calm, anticipatory, and I-can’t-do-it-in-just-one-word. Laughter echoed out into the hallway once again as I approached the classroom for Session 4. Cheerful conversation and chatter abounded before that session began, primarily related to the upcoming holiday break. I commented, “I was wondering how you would be today, if you’d be festive or if you’d be tired. You seem pretty festive,” to which one community member (deliriously?) quipped, “I think it’s festive *because* we’re tired” while others laughed in response.

Most of the time, as exhibited by a pleasant demeanor, a ready laugh, a conversational tone, a provoking question, and a willingness to participate, it appeared that community members were looking forward to and engaged in the sessions. Admittedly, most of the time we also needed an interval at the beginning of the session to still our busy brains; this provided the necessary time to detach ourselves from daily obligations in order to think deeply about complex questions related to teaching, students, and instructional and curriculum choices. Noticeably, the *only* time community members were completely quiet was when they were engaged with the reflective inquiry “assignments,” a 10- to 15-minute period during each session where community members were busily and thoughtfully answering a series of prompts designed to promote reflection. During these quiet moments, the mood of the room quickly changed in intensity: community members were leaning in, hunched over their chairs and involved in the writing. They were running their hands through their hair, cupping their chins in concentration, pondering, stretching, sighing, whispering,

reading over their responses, thinking, fidgeting, and shaking their hands out in response to all the writing. We completed one of these reflection “assignments” at each of the four sessions. During all four sessions, too, these quiet times were promptly followed by an equivalent or longer period of conversation, via table discussions (3 people per table) or random pairings, to discuss responses. Throughout the series of sessions, the community members remained chatty and congenial, with an almost continuous stream of conversation going on at each table or beside the whiteboards during activities or discussions, and good humor abounded. We laughed together, sighed together, and always had plenty to say.

Initial Course Corrections

Toward the end of Session 1, one community member requested that we carry part of our conversation related to teaching goals over to Session 2. This represented the first course correction, or shift, from the original plan. Members also took advantage of the post-session survey following Session 1 to suggest additional improvements, including the need for quiet time to *really* be quiet for the full length of time (some people had started whispering prior to the end of the full 10 minutes allotted to the writing in Session 1.) The feedback from Session 1 also helped establish the pace of each of the subsequent sessions: for instance, while one member requested “less group work,” three others expressed a desire for “more collaboration,” “more of the same,” and the opportunity to “continue talking with others.” In addition, responding to what they enjoyed about the first session, many members touched on a common theme: “community,” “talking with others,” the “chance to hear from coworkers across campus,” “knowing that I’m not alone in some of my feelings and experiences,” and “I often don’t open up to my true feelings because of how others may perceive them. I know that’s genuinely on them, not on me, but this group felt easy to be open with.” It was clear

that members valued our time together and wanted to use it to share our thoughts and ideas and learn from one another. Other participants commented on how much they liked the guided reflections/quiet reflective time; for instance, one said, “I like sitting and thinking about what I do, how I do it, and what I could do better” and another enjoyed the “time to think about our teaching philosophy” (Post-Session Survey 1). These collective responses that revealed a preference for community and conversation balanced by a need for quiet time set the structure for the next three sessions. In addition, we continued to use the feedback from post- and pre-session surveys during the off-weeks between sessions to provide discussion points, topics, and direction for future sessions. In this manner, the group could be very responsive to the questions/requests generated by its members, (shared either verbally or privately and anonymously through the surveys), and the sessions continued to evolve based on this input.

Common Challenges

Session 2, in particular, revealed just how much members had in common. It started with a simple “What Would Happen If?” sentence stem for members to complete. The questions that we wrote (without any prior related discussion amongst ourselves) revealed the fact that our collective thoughts often ran along similar lines:

A lack of student preparation. Two questions fell under the common topic of preparation:

- What would happen if students were always 100% prepared for class?
- What would happen if students completely understood the material for the day?

Respondents to these questions noted, “I would be pleased but stunned” and “Personally, I would be doing back handsprings in front of the room!” (Session 2). These replies were

greeted with laughter. On a more serious note, though, individuals pointed out that “classes could go much deeper in content and students could learn so much more, rather than re-teaching what they should have already read” and “[there are] so many things waiting in the wings that are so exciting. [Adopting enthusiastic teacher voice] ‘Let me share this with you, please. Future excitement can happen now!’” (Session 2). In asking these questions, it seems the educators in the group were used to having students arrive unprepared for class and/or desired the ability to do more with the content than they were already doing. However, this common frustration with student unpreparedness was coupled with an acknowledgement that we, ourselves, perhaps sometimes felt unprepared for class or would possibly panic if expected to do or give more. Sharing these two questions with the group helped us realize the communal stress we all experienced related to our need to support students while also negotiating our own preparation of content. Others’ daily challenges felt very familiar.

Balancing expectations with support. Five questions under the topic of student support reflected the push/pull dynamic teachers often experience in the classroom:

- What would happen if students demanded more materials, more learning, and more of our time?
- What would happen if students had the freedom to drive the content of the course?
- What would happen if students paid attention all the time and actively participated in their own success?
- What would happen if instructors never accepted late work?
- What would happen if instructors used ACA (Academic Related Instruction) concepts in the classroom?

This set of questions consumed a great deal of time and involved input from every member of the community. Responding to the demand for more learning, one individual commented, “I would say that would be fantastic, and I would be doing flips and all that, well, I would have to learn how to do that first, but that’s alright.” They then continued:

I would say it would be energizing to me to be able to get to that level, as you were saying, to be able to dive into [the content]. And maybe then at that point we could look at those individual projects and say, “Okay, if we get *this*, then how do we use it not just in real life, but for what you want to do with your career? *You* figure it out.” And I think that they would; if they’re actively participating in their own success, then they should also be actively participating in their own future. (Session 2)

Another person cautioned and questioned:

I don’t think that our student body, at least when we get them, are prepared for those discussions quite yet. And so how do you foster the ability just to be a student? How do you have *those* discussions first? How do you allow them to fail, and crash and burn a little bit, but still be supportive enough not to let that define a course or a semester? It’s tough. I mean, these are very difficult things to do. (Session 2)

To which a third person quickly added:

And their reasons for being here vary. A lot of my students work in the field already... They go and get a job and their boss is like, “You gotta go to college.” And for some of them, it’s terrifying. For some of them, it’s like [affecting a voice, and heaving a big sigh] “I’ve been doing this for 15 years. I don’t understand why I have to be in that class,” and I can see it on their faces... a lot of my students are not here for themselves. They’re here because their boss told them to go. And we made it okay

to say that because we know the truth. But it makes a difference in the kind of student that they are—a big difference for us. (Session 2)

These questions and the subsequent discussions revolving around them were indicative of the dualities members often felt in the community college classroom, pulled between a desire to push students to explore more (and for students to *want* more for themselves) while also wanting to equip students with the tools for success. In fact, these dualities were evident in the six-word mission statements members individually wrote at the end of Session 1, too, (from the “Exit Ticket” activity in Session 1: educators are not just here to believe, but to push; to empower and allay fears; to drown out the negative voices and empower and improve lives), but Session 2 was the first time this commonality was publically shared amongst the group.

Another example of dueling demands in the classroom came up during the discussion of the late paper. In response to, “What would happen if instructors never accepted late work?” the person reading the question (an A&S instructor) said, “Well, actually I’m one of those people who doesn’t.” They continued, “As long as the expectation is set at the beginning of the course, and the instructor does an adequate modeling of how it works, I have been successful with it.” A second commented, “I don’t accept late work, either,” and a third observed, “It’s an administrative nightmare.” Then a fourth (an Academic Success instructor) asked, “What would happen to those students who didn’t learn how to grow into your expectations? What happens to them next?” The original commenter said, “Well, what happens in my particular class is I have a set of assignments at the beginning of the semester that if they miss it’s not that big of a deal.” A fifth respondent said, “So you’re teaching them on a small scale. It’s not like their first thing [assignment] is 25% of their grade.” The

original commenter said, “I scaffold it.” The participant who asked about students who weren’t growing into expectations said, “Wow! Well, thank you! I like it!” and their enthusiasm for the response made everyone laugh. *Then* the original commenter amended, “In all honesty, I don’t actually have this *exact* policy anymore. I also give them a 24-hour grace period.” An earlier commenter questioned, “So essentially with the 24-hour grace period you don’t even look at the assignment until 24-hours later?” and the original respondent said, “Exactly.” The sixth member, who had also newly adopted this policy, distinguished how they implemented the grace period: “I do look at it the next morning, if my due date is 11:55pm the night before. Anybody who hasn’t submitted anything gets a zero and a note from me that says, ‘In case you overlooked the due date for this assignment, it was due last night, but I will give you until 11:55pm tonight to submit,’ and I put a specific date in for them. So they get the email, they freak out when they see the zero, and they go and they look, ‘Oh, I forgot to do it.’ Students may just overlook turning it in.” An earlier commenter then said, “I do like the idea of a grace period” (Session 2).

Through the belabored conversations in Session 2, we learned that hard and fast approaches (or perhaps, preconceived notions) to instruction were quickly coming undone in our desire to support student success, *especially* when we put more thought into our actual processes. In addition, as a cross-division conversation, this moment of realization was particularly pivotal for the community of interaction because it reflected the instant where shoulders relaxed, divisions were blurred, and we realized we were all working toward the same goal: to support student success and foster growth. We were in this work together.

A lack of time. Finally, a third common topic also came up in the questions:

- What would happen if instructors had the time to plan the creative and innovative lessons they'd always hoped to deliver to their students?
- What would happen if instructors could travel to colleges where successful transition from developmental to curriculum was outstanding?

This topic of time was also implied earlier in Session 2 when, in response to the question, “What would happen if students demanded more materials, more learning, and more of our time?” a participant who hadn’t yet spoken forthrightly answered: “I would cry a ton.” This response made everyone laugh, but its honesty also indicated a reality of teaching: most of us spend so much time in the classroom that there is little time for planning, let alone thinking. The subsequent two questions about time also generated the most “oohs” and “aahs” when read aloud. One of the quietest participants responded right away with, “That would be *incredible*, to have that incredible learning taking place. Just imagine how much more could be taking place: how much more engaged the students might be, if we had time for each lesson each day, to work on our lessons each day and have time to research and find things to add to it.” Another asked, “Does anybody have that time?” and the response, once again, was laughter.

What had started as a “simple” prompt to jumpstart our sleepy session turned into the basis for a lengthy discussion that monopolized our time together during Session 2, but the community members’ honest responses, willingness to listen and share with one another, and genuine desire to support student success broadened the exchange of ideas and deepened our relationships with one another within the community. *What was it in particular drawing us together in Session 2?* Whereas Session 1 had prioritized our individual journeys, Session 2

voiced our communal truths clearly and loudly. Although I hadn't anticipated at all the uncanny similarities our questions would hold, our common challenges and everyday frustrations, perhaps even ones we had stopped trying to articulate and just absorbed as part of the daily grind, served a higher purpose: they served to tighten the bonds of our fledgling community and elevated the trust we had with each other. As long-time educators, it's sometimes easy to spot the newbies or the veterans who've divested themselves from reality: the ones who compare how students are performing today versus "when they were a student" (they were always perfect students, by the way), perhaps, or those who intentionally find ways to eliminate as many students from the classroom as possible when they realize just how much work it takes to manage courses along with menial yet mandatory tasks. Conversations with these less-than-understanding individuals always sets me on edge, and heightens my guard as a fierce protector of students who are misunderstood. But Session 2 wasn't like that; it wasn't tense, it wasn't guarded, and I didn't find myself holding my breath. Instead, it was relaxed and humorous at times; we were blowing off steam, confessing our struggles, and holding one another up in the best possible way.

Conceptualizing Community

Having established a sense of safety, honesty, and trust during our discussions of common struggles in Session 2, Session 3 fittingly revolved around the concept of community. During this session, we explored multiple ways we could foster community: within the classroom (both online and face-to-face), amongst colleagues, and across campus. In fact, our ability to do this exploration was partly based on the collective realization that we *ourselves* served as a model for community. A conversation that demonstrated the flourishing dynamic of community within our small group took place during Session 3, related to the

topic of the under-talker versus the over-talker. Initially, a few members provided specific strategies for working with this tricky dynamic, and then a third member mentioned, “I have a class this semester with a lot of over-talkers, and they have big, biiiig egos.” The second speaker advised, “Put them all in the same group” and the third speaker stated, “I did.” “Did it work?” asked the second speaker, and the third responded, “No.” Then a fourth participant spoke up and said, “What I also do, instead of groups, is pairs,” and the third speaker responded, “Yeah, that’s an idea, too.” A fifth participant pondered, “How would you do it?” and the fourth elaborated. The third participant then commented, “God, where were you at the beginning of this year?” and everyone laughed (Session 3). What this conversation demonstrated was the ability to honestly convey our struggles, bounce ideas off one another, problem-solve, and laugh about situations that challenged us; it was one of many discussions that helped us establish common ground.

In addition, the “community amongst colleague” suggestions generated by the group mirrored many of the strategies we were already using within our community of interaction:

- Practice listening.
- Meetings to share best teaching practices.
- Learn about what others do.
- Be personal! We spend a lot of hours here! It can be isolating!
- Round tables
- Build an understanding between departments/divisions/staff/etc. as to what we all do so we can have mutual respect for all the components
- Say “thank you” and “What’s going on?”

- Active listening and no judging.
- Know that we all work long terrible hours.

All of these were strategies that that we employed and built upon from session to session.

Finally, at least two campus-wide ideas of note were generated during this session, too, during our group discussion. One member shared:

You know what I think would be a good one? This comes from another university: they have a specific day and time where there are no classes each week, but everybody is still expected to be there. And they go out on the quad, if it's warm, or I guess the auditorium if it's not, and sometimes the president provides doughnuts, but it's a Q &A, mingling, discussions, and you're not allowed to work. You have to mingle with students...I sure wish we could do something like that. (Session 3)

Another member responded:

That [the suggestion for a campus-wide hour for mingling] can piggyback with my idea, professional learning communities (PLC)...Basically, it provides opportunities to come together and talk about teaching, talk about student learning, and all those things, and that time off when there's no classes, that could be time where those kinds of things could happen. (Session 3)

What was particularly beneficial about our discussion of community in Session 3 was not only an increased understanding in the many ways community could be fostered on campus but also the deeper pull this discussion created within us. After all, if we knew as much as we claimed we did about community, as demonstrated by the suggestions we shared as well as our current interactions with each other, why weren't we working earnestly to nurture community campus-wide? In the words of a common phrase that some attribute to Voltaire

or Churchill and others associate with Spiderman: “With great power comes great responsibility” (Lee & Ditko, 1987). Is it possible that our ready dependence on each other, along with deepening obligation to our campus community, was starting to propel us toward greater purpose? As it happens, Session 3, in particular, produced ideas that outlasted the four sessions in the Fall semester.

Collective Actions

With collaboration came action: participants collectively and resoundingly requested more resources related to reflective inquiry in order to explore and strategically practice it. In fact, we spent a significant portion of Session 4 generating ideas for how we could apply reflective practices in the classroom. Collectively, too, the desire to apply reflective inquiry was noted in the initial takeaways members jotted down as the “Exit Ticket” activity at the conclusion of Session 4:

- I need to add more reflection in my courses.
- Ways of bringing greater/broader conversations in class to encourage greater reflection & perspective taking from students.
- 1. Listening--true listening
 2. Questions/Assignments to help students think critically
 3. Help and importance of helping students see “the point” of any given class
 4. Sensitivity to multiple perspectives
- Reflection is essential for all of us, and modeling and requiring it of our students is highly beneficial. I will look for ways to incorporate reflection throughout my courses, not just at the end.

- Two big take-aways—
 1. Be even more reflective in the classroom (will use some of your great handouts)
 2. By listening to others talk about online class practices, I plan to revamp one of my online classes to spice it up and include more reflection
- I know exactly what I am going to change for the 1st day of class, half-way through the class, and at the end of the class for next semester.
- I think this is a great way for first semester students to get accustomed to asking questions and hopefully becoming more comfortable to ask without anonymity.
- I will use some of the worksheets and activities
- Incorporate reflection more with them as it is vital that they are aware of their processes, strengths, weaknesses, and needs.

Clearly, the prompts and time for reflection were a key element that members desired to put into practice both in the classroom and for their own learning. Conversation, listening, and reflection came up time and time again in these individual responses. That said, I didn't find it very surprising that our community wanted clear and practical ways for applying reflection in the classroom; overall, this desire simply reinforced just how often we tend to operate at the axis of theory and practice. *Okay, you've made us think and you've showed us something new, but now let's talk about we can apply what we've learned.* On the one hand, if our community hadn't thought the lessons learned during the sessions were valuable, it is extremely likely that they would not have attended all four sessions (after all, their time was clearly limited). On the other hand, when push came to shove, the bottom line for many of us remained one of application: how can we put this to use in the classroom? Notably, whereas the first three sessions reflected a clear division of seating, Session 4 finally brought with it a

shift in seating that reflected a greater intermingling of the two divisions. In addition, the “Exit Ticket” activity for Session 4 carried forward a community-based suggestion from Session 3 when one member wrote, “I’d love to see this continue on a new level. A PLC—where we work collectively and individually on reflective inquiry!” (Session 4 “Exit Ticket”). Most surprising to me at the end of Session 4 was the fact that participants did not want it to end: instead, due to our newfound common ground in an established and trusted environment, we craved *more time* together as a community to put our newfound learning into practice.

Five Findings

In looking back over the four sessions, we discovered that by initially being open to a new idea and learning to rely on one another, and despite everything else we had going on, the community of interaction provided us with motivation, reassurance, support, an avenue for frustration and laughter, ideas, and even specific solutions to problems. In addition, based on an examination of the PD series as a whole through open coding and thematic analysis, five collective findings, significant primarily because of the frequency with which they occurred or the time we spent discussing them, stood out. Certainly, these findings are not an exhaustive list, nor are they meant to imply that the entirety of the data from these sessions could be wrapped tidily into five summative statements. Rather, they simply represent the prevalent themes that emerged over multiple readings of the data as a whole.

Finding 1: A commitment to life-long learning. Although they were already inundated with “mandatory” assignments related to the start of the Fall 2016 semester and their roles at MCC, participants *willingly* attended all four sessions because of a desire to strengthen skills, empower themselves, gather ideas for classes, and share struggles. Not only did members list

these as reasons for initially attending the PD opportunity, but they also demonstrated this commitment to learning through their attendance, receptiveness, contributions, and focus during the four sessions: we began with 11 participants (including myself) and we ended with 11.

Finding 2: A desire for more time. Closely tied to members' desires for self-improvement was the fact that they often felt crunched for time. For instance, participants noted the need to prioritize duties not directly related to teaching, referring to all that other "stuff," that "takes so much more time and takes me away from prepping and my creative slant" (Session 1). This desire for more time was also closely connected to the belief that time for reflection and planning could positively impact students, too: "That would be *incredible*, to have that incredible learning taking place" (Session 2). Time (or the lack thereof) was a topic time and time again, both collectively in group discussions and individually in personal reflections.

Finding 3: A belief in teaching-as-a-mission. Despite an observation that in teaching "you're going to get your heart broken," (Session 1) the participants in this session readily reinforced the principles of a Herring's "open-door" policy (Quinterno, 2008, p. 210) related to open access at community colleges in North Carolina. Their action-oriented, six-word mission statements also reflected the dichotomies of teaching in a community college, and the clear majority of the questions members posed during Session 2 related to the extraordinary challenge of balancing expectations with scaffolded support for students. In addition, members' frustration at not having all the answers, their willingness to share and face challenges, and their apparent fatigue from having dwelled on the challenges they were

facing during their limited thinking time outside of classes, were all indicative of their long-lasting commitment to students.

Finding 4: A desire to reach students who struggle. The replies in Session 2 about feeling surprised or overwhelmed in response to the questions related to student preparation (or a demand for more instruction from students) indicated that the unprepared student was not uncommon within the community college environment. However, it was very telling that the conversation in Session 2 did not turn toward disparaging students for their under-preparedness, but rather toward solutions (in fact, conversations in all four sessions *never* turned toward criticism or complaint). Specifically, the discussion related to late work revealed the fact that many of the instructors actively sought techniques to support students along the way, including a revision to original classroom policy. Again, “how-to” questions related to students who struggled were a frequent topic of participants’ personal contemplations, and responses to the request for takeaways at the end of Session 4 also indicated a desire to try a new technique (reflective inquiry) supported by the belief that it might help these students in particular.

Finding 5: A desire to continue the dialogue. The primary finding from the last session was that most community members did not want to be done. In the initial takeaway from the course a participant wrote, “Experiencing this PD with the colleagues in the room was very rewarding. I’d love to see this continue on a new level. A PLC—where we work collectively and individually on reflective inquiry!” (“Exit ticket” Session 4). Correspondingly, this question was included on the Post-PD Survey to gauge interest: “It was suggested after the last session that we form a PLC (professional learning community) in order to continue our collaboration. Would you be interested in participating in a Reflective Inquiry PLC during

the spring semester?” Of the nine respondents, seven checked “Yes,” another stated it “has to be on a Friday” and the ninth said “Maybe; depends on the time and duration.” In spite of the fact that many of our waking hours were already dedicated to students, teaching, and other “stuff,” participants seemed to believe that this professional development opportunity was worth their on-going time and commitment.

A Comprehensive Vision

As a writer, I was curious what would happen if I assembled these five findings, or phrases, into sentences. To my delight, I discovered that they formed the following description of our time together:

Members of the community of interaction *believe in teaching-as-a-mission* and *desire to reach students who struggle*. As such, they are *committed to life-long learning* and *desire more time* because they believe this time to reflect would positively impact students, too. Due to these commonalities, the members *desire to continue the dialogue* found within the community from semester to semester.

When pulled together, these findings shape a larger vision (or statement of intentions) held by the community of interaction. This broader and collectively-held vision also provides a few hints as to the reasons why 10 seasoned educators, in the middle of a very busy semester brimming with mandatory obligations and new responsibilities related to their roles, would choose to take *more* time out of their busy schedules to commit to a colleague’s research project, an oddity known as “reflective inquiry,” and the simple promise to “look at the reasons *why* we teach, address current issues in the classroom, brainstorm solutions, and share best practices.” Accordingly, a more global examination of our community of interaction will occur in Chapter 5. Above all, this collective vision is indicative of the

following convictions: teaching as a long-term commitment, a belief in professional growth, a search for self-awareness, a willingness to adapt, and a deeply-rooted desire to see students succeed.

Profile Postscript

December 2016 – January 2017

In what I considered to be a fitting end to the fall semester, I had another meeting with the PD office just a couple of hours after wrapping up Session 4 of the Reflective Inquiry PD on December 2nd. This time around, the meeting was to discuss a new PD idea that they wanted me to design and teach during the Spring 2017 semester. Although the new PD opportunity was unrelated to the dissertation research, it was nice to go into the holiday break knowing the PD department that they had confidence in my ability to lead PD sessions (and would likely be more receptive to suggestions in the future).

Finally, after returning from the holiday break in early January, all full-time faculty were required to attend a Spring In-service to kick off the start of the Spring 2017 semester at MCC. Although we were randomly assigned to tables for this in-service, I found myself sitting across from two other members of the community of interaction from our professional development sessions. After the initial beginning-of-the-year speeches, reminders, and pronouncements, we were given 10 minutes to work together on a problem-solving task related to this question: “What do we need to improve on campus?” In this short time together, we were supposed to think of a problem on campus that could be solved within the next six months, and discuss both the problem and our suggested solutions to the problem. *What do you think is the issue that came up at our table?* The problem suggested by the two other members of our community of interaction should sound very familiar, as it was the

deficit of time for reflection, collaboration, and deliberation outside of class in order to strengthen our teaching inside the classroom. Based on this need, we wrote up a solution of incentivized in-service time (similar to the idea voiced in Session 3 related to an all-campus hour for mingling) that would allow faculty to visit other departments, have conversations, reflect, connect, collaborate, and stimulate their current teaching practice.

Fitting the Findings into the Framework

It is essential, toward the end of the journey, to remind ourselves how exactly we got here. In Chapter 1, I noted that the first step along the path to probing misperceptions related to students and developmental education was through the framework of social constructionism. Now, at the end of Chapter 4, it is equally important to fit the findings back into the framework once more in order to hold them up for theoretical analysis. Consider the following: Gergen (2015) once noted: “In creating a desirable world together, we simultaneously produce an alternative world of the less than desired. For everything in which we place value, there is also a negative exterior, the not-valued” (p. 121). But if we flip that script, taking advantage of a “world” that is already undesirable, we find an opportunity to provide that which is desirable. In this case, I’m referring to the very small world that was the MCC campus at the start of the Fall 2016 semester, with administrators, faculty, and students in the throes of the compulsory implementation of multiple state- and campus-wide policies including Multiple Measures, a new pathways project, mandatory advising, and mandatory PD related to “First Semester Students.” In the midst of this mayhem, an opportunity for something different (and possibly desirable) emerged: it was optional, though it did require participants to commit to four sessions throughout the semester, went by a funny title, “Reflective Inquiry,” and promised the chance to get together and chat about

teaching. If we look closely once again at the tenets of educational inquiry as they relate to social constructionism, we can start to understand some of the appeal this community offered its members:

1. **The community was founded on relationships:** Half of the participants in the community of interaction came from one division at MCC, and half the participants came from another division. It is safe to say that the participants within each division knew of each other even if they did not know each other well. However, over the course of four sessions, community members had plenty of opportunities to get to know one another through random or purposeful pairings, group conversations, and informal chats before and after (or sometimes during) the sessions. Although we did not share our mission statements in Session 1 with each other, resoundingly, they reflected an emphasis on *action*. They also revealed dichotomies specific to teaching at an open-access institution: a desire to empower coupled with a need to allay fears, a desire to overcome obstacles in order to improve, a desire to make a difference while negating the negative. Correspondingly, almost every one of these individual mission statements involved a negotiation between expectations and support. Moving forward from Session 1, the camaraderie we found within the community of interaction allowed us to discover and articulate these commonalities amongst ourselves (and that we had initially identified individually) within the safety of a shared setting.
2. **The community emphasized dialogue:** In reviewing the data for these sessions, it was clear members enjoyed (and, in fact, requested) group conversations. These participants liked to talk, and given their own volition, often opted for either group or

partner conversations over writing activities. In fact, the plan for entire sessions (Session #2, in particular) was shifted to make way for the continuation of a large group conversation. Through dialogue, we discovered that we carried a shared weight of responsibility related to teaching at MCC. This responsibility wore each of us down over the long haul; we battled fatigue and workloads that threatened to consume us. Over time, we realized that many of us were struggling with the very same issues (just look at how many similar questions were posed during Session 2: *What would happen if students had the freedom to drive the content of the course? What would happen if students actively participated in their own success?*). We recognized that the push and pull dynamisms we *all* faced related to student expectations versus preparation, teaching obligations inside the classroom versus outside the classroom, and the constant lack of time versus a desire for more time to think were common to all of us. These shared struggles and challenges (as well as the potential for possible solutions) drew us together and provided us with common ground and understanding.

3. **The community fostered *new* relationships, *new* dialogue, and *new* understanding which resulted in collaboration:** Over the course of the sessions, we realized that a significant benefit to our coming together was the ability of the community to disperse and alleviate the collective weight we bore. We discovered that a capacity for honestly conveying our struggles, bouncing ideas off one another, problem-solving, and laughing about challenging situations engaged, relieved, and invigorated us, and we left the sessions wanting more: more time (as always), more discussions, more solutions, more dialogue, more laughter, more collaboration. One

of the best pieces of evidence related to this point is the fact that participant seating choices for the last session reflected a mix of the two divisions, whereas during the first three sessions participants were married to their divisive seating choices. In Session 3, too, a participant questioned, “God, where were you at the beginning of this year?” in appreciation of other members’ responses to a classroom challenge. As the sessions progressed, there was greater evidence of *interaction* between multiple individuals during conversations. In Session 2, for instance, everyone spoke up during the group discussion. Over time, too, conversations reflected more of a back and forth dynamic, full of give and take between divisions and amongst multiple people.

4. **These collaborations prompted specific actions and changes in practice:** The connective tissue of the community of interaction challenged, stretched, pulled and protected all of us as we sought a greater understanding of ourselves, our colleagues, and our students; it united us, changed us, and broadened our range inside the classroom as well as our reach outside the classroom. It brought us together and gave us people to rely on and to seek out for assistance when needed. In response to the post-survey reflection question for Session 1, one community member wrote: “I have been reflecting on how we (faculty in my department) view students (often not in a positive light) and how that impacts our responses to them and how we approach teaching them. As a result, I’ve decided to work diligently to reframe my view of students...It’s not US against THEM” (Post-session Survey 1). This observation occurred at the end of Session 1; by the end of Session 4, community members had gathered multiple best practices and ideas and delineated ways that they were going to put reflection into practice. In addition, they had requested a PLC that we could

carry into the Spring 2017 semester to keep the momentum going; our collaboration produced action that extended beyond the four walls of the classroom, our four PD sessions, and the fall semester.

In multiple ways, the community of interaction was appealing, at least initially, because it was the other, the “not-valued,” the opposite of compulsory. Over the course of four sessions, this initial appeal paved the way for a valued community of interaction that developed because its members were open and honest with one another and committed to learning more, pushing themselves, and working together to better support all students.

Proliferating Myth-Perceptions

Keeping in mind that social constructionism provides more than just the tenets for educational inquiry noted above, and considering Marx and Engel’s (1939) and Mannheim’s (1936) views of consciousness and ideology, it is equally important, when discussing the framework and the findings, to examine how myths related to students and developmental education were probed in this research study. Quite unexpectedly, the first major shift to the myth-perceptions related to students and developmental education came from outside the community of interaction. By choosing to use the term “first semester students” to describe students who were bypassing developmental education coursework and would be placed in curriculum coursework during the first semester, even if it was possibly a “politically-correct” decision, the division of Arts & Sciences proliferated the ideology related to students and developmental education before the semester even began. No longer were “developmental students” being distinguished or differentiated as such. Therefore, in keeping with this new development, I felt it was my responsibility to reinforce this broader conception of students and developmental education by embracing the term and using this

language within our community, too: I changed the informed consent, for instance, from students enrolled in “developmental education” to “first semester students,” and throughout the sessions and pre- and post-session surveys I referenced “first semester students” when posing questions. No longer were we differentiating between developmental or non-developmental coursework in our discussions. In doing so, the accepted term of “first semester students” ultimately provided us with common ground; first semester students were students we *all* served, no matter what division we were from.

As Gergen (2015) noted, “Constructionism invites a certain humility about one’s assumptions and ways of life...and opens the way to replacing the contentious battles over who is right with the mutual probing for possibilities” (p. 27). Perhaps the best example of our ability to navigate this new common ground was the “late paper” cross-division exchange that occurred during Session 2: Consider that pivotal moment in the conversation where the original commenter acknowledged, “In all honesty, I don’t actually have this *exact* policy anymore. I also give them a 24-hour grace period” (Session 2). This honest admission changed the conversation and the dynamic of our community’s interaction because the binary between hard and fast rules and scaffolded student support suddenly evaporated. The conversation was no longer about the late paper, but about devising strategies that could benefit *all* students. This was a moment where we encountered the very embodiment of the epistemology of social constructionism within our community of interaction. Suddenly, first semester students were not a challenge to overcome, but an opportunity to provide support and foster growth.

Our community of interaction flourished and grew out of the tenets of educational inquiry that are fundamental to the framework of social constructionism, including dialogue,

relationships, collaboration, and action. The community of interaction spurred individual change *and* collective action. In addition, the very pliability of social constructionism permitted us to proliferate perspectives related to students and dissolved our differences; instead of binaries and barriers, we found common ground as we shared challenges, searched for ways to balance educational expectations with support for those who need it, and explored solutions together.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In school, sometimes it is the heartfelt trust of a teacher in the worth of a student in a completely local situation that produces a faith within the student that he or she is connected to the world in a way that matters, and that the world is worth caring about. Often it is the day-by-day exchanges that open our capacities to care about, seek to understand, and work for that which is beyond our immediate view, that which is larger than us, but includes and holds us. – Peggy McIntosh (2013)

This research journey began with a startling discovery back in late 2015 that curriculum instructors at Mountain Community College (MCC) feared the very students we taught on a daily basis in the department of Developmental Studies. Acting on a desire to *do something* about this issue at MCC, a qualitative research project based on the formation of a community of interaction evolved. This research study was built upon the theoretical framework of social constructionism and its tenets of educational inquiry. It was implemented in tandem with the methodology of insider action research during the first semester that Multiple Measures, a North Carolina legislative policy related to placement, was in effect at MCC in the Fall of 2016. Accordingly, two fundamental questions were developed to evaluate the research:

- How did a commitment to a broader understanding of students enrolled in or bypassing developmental education shape us, as educators, in light of the implementation of Multiple Measures in the Fall of 2016?
- How was the process of reflection integral to the community of interaction?

In Chapter 4, findings related to the community of interaction were relayed through a comprehensive process profile and related context. Five collective study findings were then nested within the framework of social constructionism and connected to its tenets of educational inquiry. In this concluding chapter, at the end of the research journey, it is important to respond to the research questions, revisit the literature in order to locate the

research at the axis of theory and practice, and prioritize reflection as a necessity in the context of today's turbulent higher education environment. As such, Chapter 5 includes interpretations related to the two research questions, implications, criticism, a pause for reflection, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

Research Question #1

How did a commitment to a broader understanding of students enrolled in or bypassing developmental education shape us, as educators, in light of the implementation of Multiple Measures in the Fall of 2016?

First and foremost, as noted in Chapter 4's profile preface, the community of interaction stood in direct contrast to the mandatory measures implemented at MCC in the Fall of 2016, and was, perhaps specifically for that reason, appealing to the 10 participants who registered for the professional development sessions. The community members who participated were long-time educators, with over 175 combined years of experience. Once the 11 of us were together, we found common ground and camaraderie within the framework of social constructionism, and our dialogue, relationships, and collaborations flourished in this environment. As such, our differences were rapidly dissolved. The sessions provided a safe place for us to ask and answer questions (and we had many, many questions), brainstorm ideas, share problems, and pose possible solutions. It was a place to be honest and truthful. It was a space for listening and sharing. It was a place to ask for help. It was a space for confession and conversation. The community of interaction alleviated the weight of responsibility we hold as educators in a community college; in voicing our concerns, we discovered practical strategies and solutions we could immediately put into practice in addition to a sympathetic ear. Because the community of interaction was the opposite of

mandatory, it left us craving more. Seen in this light, instead of functioning as a barrier, Multiple Measures, as a policy, provided us with the excuse and opportunity to try something new. In short, the community of interaction worked, despite a multitude of odds against it.

Eleven seasoned educators, in the midst of a busy semester, initially enrolled in a course that was described as a promise to “look at the reasons *why* we teach, address current issues in the classroom, brainstorm solutions, and share best practices.” Thinking broadly, the community of interaction was a safe and dynamic way to examine just how a community that seeks change can function together. What was effective and what wasn’t effective? What worked for our group? Why did it work? What did we want to change? What we discovered, together, was a protected environment for sharing struggles and new ideas; but *beyond* those issues, the community of interaction was a testing ground for trying out new roles related to the greater responsibility we held for making this type of community happen campus-wide. It was a safe place to be bold and to see what that felt like. This is particularly important because, as we know from the literature revolving around developmental education (DE), educators in this field have remained silent for far too long, at great costs to both students and themselves alike. As Neuburger, Goosen, and Barry (2013) warned, “When faculty voices remain silent, the results that trickle down...often do not reflect the best research nor respect the diverse needs of students” (p. 73). This community of interaction was distinct because it emboldened us as educators, too. After all, while it is one thing to choose to remain quiet, we should not assume that educators are *unwilling* to speak up: beyond personal inclination, perhaps they have just not yet had the time or opportunity to learn how to speak up effectively or engage with one another productively, the knowledge needed to create a

receptive environment for doing so, or the trust in others to support what they say.

Sometimes they might just need to know where to start, that it is okay to start small, and that important work can be achieved, despite the odds, if one is simply willing to try.

Our initial commitment to exploring the topic of reflective inquiry through a community of interaction led to a broader understanding of students, and united, uplifted, supported, and propelled us forward as educators. As Palmer (1993a) observed, “The communal nature of knowing goes beyond the relations of knowers,” and, as a result of this process, “We now see that to know something is to have a living relationship with it” (p. xv). Drawn together by a common vision, we considered ourselves invested over the long haul. In many ways, the community provided the structure and support for thinking deeply and broadly about issues related to education and our teaching, gave us the time to do so, and resulted in real change.

Research Question #2

How was the process of reflection integral to the community of interaction?

Surprisingly, the first noticeable impact the reflective process had on the community of interaction, in tandem with the cyclical nature of action research, came during the “taking stock” step: *it was the simple but precious gift of time to think about teaching*. Although most sessions needed some sort of introductory activity to give participants time to decompress or relax, community members took the reflective writing time very seriously (to the point of requesting after Session 1 that everyone remain quiet for the entire reflection period). Correspondingly, although the original session plans shifted due to the very nature of action research, *all* four sessions featured time to take stock: for ten metacognitive minutes, respondents took time to sit down and ruminate over a set of reflective questions.

Thinking broadly, action research typically has tiered goals related to problem-solving and contributing to theory (Coughlan & Brannick, 2014). In reality, the action research process almost immediately spiraled outward from the first set of reflective inquiry questions regarding our personal practice. From this point on in the sessions, multiple things were happening at once: for instance, and excitingly, community members were putting ideas into practice immediately, and then coming back and asking for advice. In addition, participant requests, either expressed verbally during sessions, such as an entreaty to talk more about a certain topic next time or written in response to post- or pre- session survey questions, also drove the way future sessions evolved. Within the context of the community, individual spirals started, stopped, paused or rewound as participants drove their own ways. Communally, however, I would propose that in *addition* to thinking time, the time set aside for writing (especially writing as *inquiry*) was equally important, whether or not this was realized by the individual group members. After all, it was the process of writing, in *response* to the reflective questions, that provoked discovery and discussion. Because I intentionally did not collect the written responses to the reflective questions, members were free to write as much or as little as they wanted, and to be as open or honest with themselves as desired. In this way, the reflective questions prompted the writing which then spurred conversations and action. As Crotty (1998) once reminded us, “True praxis can never be merely cerebral. It must involve action. Nor can it be limited to mere activism. It must include serious reflection” (1998, p. 151). One part cannot function without the other; both are interdependent on and interactive within the process. Although members expressed a need for more time, it is important to note that not just *any* type of time would do. To fulfill the expectations of what this extra time would accomplish, and in order to positively (or

profoundly) impact students, this time would have to involve space for a settled brain, a few specific questions to prompt reflection, room to write, helpful colleagues for discussion, and additional time to put new ideas into practice. The reflective inquiry questions provided members with time to think and write within the safe context of community, and by Session 4 they were clamoring for ways to apply reflective inquiry within the classroom or as a strategy for self-awareness.

We can be assured that we are rooted at the axis of theory and practice when the work that is produced evokes the principles of yin and yang. Indeed, we saw these principles in many forms throughout the research process. For instance, viewed through the lens of social constructionism, the undesirable and the desirable worked in tandem. In action research, then, it is also true that the clamor *and* the quiet were essential; neither could function without the other. Therefore, the reflective process was representative of multiple interactions that guided the research: the mandatory and the optional, the individual and the community, the contemplation and conversation, the honesty and outspokenness, the writing and the reflection, and the doing and the thinking all had to function together in order to yield results. In addition, these dynamic interactions melded to form specific intentions:

Members of the community of interaction *believe in teaching-as-a-mission and desire to reach students who struggle*. As such, they are *committed to life-long learning and desire more time* because they believe this time to reflect would positively impact students, too. Due to these commonalities, the members *desire to continue the dialogue* found within the community from semester to semester.

And these intentions, once again, and, in fact, cyclically, guided actions, practice, and a commitment to reflection.

Spurred by a few quiet moments alone with our thoughts, we discovered a profoundly practical application for reflective inquiry within the learning environment of our own classes. According to Saxon, Martirosyan, Wentworth, and Boylan (2015), the number one request regarding research that pertained to meaningful practice was for *best practices in instruction*. As validated by our experiences within the community, reflective inquiry is a best practice that one can conduct individually or collectively in a variety of ways. As Schön (1983) observed, “When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context” (p. 68). Rodgers, too, considered reflective inquiry to be “a meaning-making cycle,” (as cited in Henderson and Gornik, 2007, p. 67), and Henderson and Gornik believed that our personal and professional understanding as educators could be developed through reflective inquiry. The end result of the metacognitive minutes, or thinking about our thinking (and more pointedly, our teaching), was increased knowledge or understanding that could be used to inform practice. For example, not only did we use reflection within the context of community, but members mentioned multiple ways they were eager to *apply* the practice of reflection in their own classrooms: by encouraging students to ask questions, by cultivating self-awareness, by fostering conversation and hearing and appreciating multiple perspectives, by connecting the course to a greater context, by incorporating reflection in small doses throughout a course instead of just at the end, by adding it into the online course environment, and by allowing for quiet time for students to sit with their thoughts and show what they know. In addition, as a result of this treasured time to think, write, and talk, two other profoundly tangible actions occurred:

- We formed a professional learning community (PLC) that outlasted the original research study and extended into the Spring 2017 semester
- We pitched the idea of incentivized in-service time for all faculty and staff at MCC in an effort to take reflective inquiry campus-wide

These collective and on-going actions, in addition to a commitment to put reflection into practice within the classroom, were produced as the direct results of the process of reflective inquiry, and will live on beyond the parameters of the research. Isn't this, then, a true demonstration of the importance of theory in practice?

Implications

Consider this: At MCC, our relationships (fostered under a spirit of collegiality) opened the door for honest dialogue and the exploration of new ways of knowing; they resulted in intentional interaction that created a space for listening and understanding. In this way, our collaboration was the catalyst for transformation and action. Consequently, by allowing “relational leading” to take center stage (Gergen, 2015, p. 200), our established relationships and honest dialogue resulted in a desire to *do something* about a current issue at MCC. Additionally, tethered by a desire to better understand the processes of teaching and learning, we witnessed the dynamism of the symbiotic relationship that can occur between education and social constructionism. Within the community of interaction, the act of reflection functioned as a pervasive perception-corrector, dispelling dominant myth-perceptions. Perhaps most surprisingly, our time together has continued to produce positive and generative effects. For example, just a few weeks ago another Arts & Sciences instructor who had not been able to participate in our series of sessions in the fall asked if I would run the professional development again during the 2017-2018 school year. The community of

interaction described within this research study was not mandatory, but it was effective, and more than that, it was generous, enjoyable, informative, and, excitingly, outlived the parameters of this study. It was a gentler way to understanding based on the fundamentals of developmental education, nested in theory and practice, and positively charged by committed participants who were willing to try something new. In tandem with the *spirals* of action research, the *open-ended process* of social constructionism, and our *cyclical* orb of intentions, we encountered a profound metacognitive ripple that refuses to be isolated to a single research study.

Beyond ripples, though, we can also find disruption. Thinking broadly, the community of interaction disrupted norms related to power dynamics that sometimes seem inherent to campuses everywhere: for instance, the assumption that only *some* departments should serve underprepared students, the thinking that professional development must be mandatory to be effective, or the perception that there is nothing to be done about policies implemented from above. The results of this study stand tall in contrast to these assumptions, and interfere (for the better) with current conceptions of campus culture. Concretely, and collectively, looking back over the study, we can see just how the theoretical framework and results interacted. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), our reality is socially constructed through our everyday lives. As this study demonstrated, reality at MCC was created and positively influenced by the members of our community. In keeping with an emphasis on the everyday, Gergen (2015) pointed out that our interpretation of truth was dependent on our social relationships. In this manner, our dialogue within the community revealed the similarity of our missions as educators and allowed us to discover shared truths. Mannheim (1936), Marx and Engels (1939), and Koch (2005) warned of the dangers related

to ideology, implicit ideas, and myths, and we addressed and proliferated some of these myth-perceptions related to developmental education within the community, too. In this manner, clearly guided by the theoretical framework, the relationships and dialogue found at the heart of social constructionism allowed us to create new understandings related to ourselves as educators, our students, our instruction, and even the campus culture, and produced real change. Simply put, what this study demonstrated is this: By seeking common ground, faculty members have the ability in the palm of their hands (and heads) to dissolve differences, disrupt pervading myth-perceptions, defy demonstrations of dominance, and *do something*, and they can use this influence for the greater good.

Criticism

I am, by nature, an optimist. At the beginning of this research journey I reflected: ...what I needed most from the research methodology was a way to collaborate with fellow faculty in order to collectively interrogate our reasons for teaching and to improve upon our work by discussing and proposing strategies that could positively influence students' classroom experiences (and faculty/student engagement, and even retention, if we were shooting for the moon) in the process. Was that too much to ask? I realized at the beginning of this project that my goals were and will always remain lofty. (this document, p. 15)

In many ways, this optimism could be my undoing within this research study. This work is not without subjectivity. It looks to the light, and seeks it out. The research took place at the campus where I work. It is personal. I was invested in the process from the beginning. I wanted it to work. I wanted to *do something*.

I would argue, though, that optimism is sometimes necessary for persistence. Looking back at the beginning of the fall semester, I was not sure that this project was ever going to get off the ground. My ideas were initially put off by the PD department and ignored by the Arts & Sciences division. The speech went unsaid. I was even starting to wonder if the effort was all just a big waste of time...but it wasn't. I couldn't give up because I knew that whether or not this project succeeded, Multiple Measures would still be in effect. Students would *still* be caught in the gap between developmental and curriculum coursework. Frankly, I was unwilling to consider what would happen if this project didn't happen, even if it turned out to be unsuccessful in the long run. After all, as Esterberg noted: "At heart, all action researchers are concerned that research not simply contribute to our knowledge but also lead to positive changes in people's lives" (2002, p. 137). For me, the cup is always half-full; it is always better to ask the question than to stay quiet and wonder, "What if...?" All this to say, the biggest criticism you might want to give this project is that I brought myself into it, to which I will admit that I really can't help it. I believe community college students are my life's work, though now, in my position as chair of a department, I need to amend that to include faculty, too. I am committed to providing, maintaining, and modeling a pervasive ethic of care that positively impacts community college students and faculty. That part about "heart" that Esterberg noted? It gets me every time, because *I'm all in*.

Pausing for Reflection

If you'll permit me to meander for a moment at the end of this research journey, I wanted to share an important realization with you: sometimes, *sometimes*, a gentle approach is best. Back at the very beginning of my doctoral journey, when I was still struggling to figure out what I wanted to *do*, I read a piece about finding "way" by Parker Palmer (2015).

In the story that Palmer shared, he noted that he had been searching for quite some time for a “new direction,” and had called upon his peers within a Quaker community for advice. He described his interactions with them this way:

“Have faith,” they said, “and *way will open*.” “I have faith,” I thought to myself.

“What I don’t have is time to wait for ‘way’ to open. I’m approaching middle age at warp speed, and I have yet to find a vocational path that feels right. The only way that’s opened so far is the wrong way.” (“When Way Closes”)

Eventually, out of frustration, Palmer decided to consult Ruth, “an older Quaker woman well-known for her thoughtfulness and candor,” and told her how he was continuously searching for way to open and becoming increasingly frustrated because it was not opening for him. He wrote:

Ruth’s reply was a model of Quaker plain-speaking: “I’m a birthright Friend,” she said somberly, “and in sixty-plus year of living, way has never opened in front of me.” She paused, and I started sinking into despair. Was this wise woman telling me that the Quaker concept of guidance was a hoax? Then she spoke again, this time with a grin: “But a lot of way has closed behind me, and that’s had the same guiding effect.” (2015, “When Way Closes”)

Sometimes way comes in the form of unexpected acceleration: in the span of three years, dovetailing the doctoral journey, I went from adjunct to full-time instructor to chair, and my positioning as a researcher changed overnight when I assumed responsibility for a staff of 16. More frequently, however, way seems to decelerate: the PD department was skeptical about my proposal, the division of Arts & Sciences already had a plan in place for the year, the planned speech went unsaid, and the research did not start until mid-semester. To be honest,

there were many moments along this journey when I wondered if what I wanted to *do*, in terms of the research study, was even going to be possible. And yet, it was.

Conclusions

Rather than the axis of theory and practice, Parker Palmer (1993b) often writes from the intersection “between faith and intellect,” and within that space he identified a few words “that might move us toward a transformed understanding of knowing”: truth is *personal*, *communal*, *reciprocal*, and *transformative*. (How’s that for a six-word mission statement?) There’s a great deal to be said for the art of contemplation applied to higher education, with its emphasis on mindfulness, intention, reflection, and respect. Thinking globally, I propose that in order to begin to combat negative and far-reaching power plays, and in order to fight back against implicit or long-standing ideology, it is imperative that we stop the busyness of our constant *doing* in order to make way for mindfulness. I also acknowledge that I find this quite ironic given my desperation to *do something* that resulted in this study. But the truth is, we can’t always be doing; we must also take time to think in order to move forward with intention.

Because we cannot expect those in power to be guided by the best of intentions, it is essential that we put our minds to good use: START is a simple way to foster this new habit:

Stop the doing

Think about thinking: take a meta-minute or two

Ask a contemplative question

Reflect and write a response

Talk it out with others

Consider START a teeny-tiny counter-strategy that has the potential to grow and multiply: over time, a few metacognitive minutes could produce a generative wave of understanding. After all, the ten-minute timeout for reflection that occurred during each of the four sessions in this study sent ripples of change reverberating across campus. Imagine, then, how our collective meta-minutes could produce real change far beyond the reach of a single educator, college campus, legislative policy, or populace.

In consideration of the original rationale for this study, and in terms of what we've already discovered, it's high time to pose an important question: who else could benefit from the success of this study? According to disaggregated data from the Fall 2016 semester, the Developmental Studies department at MCC served a population that is distinctly more diverse (in terms of proportion to the whole) than the rest of the college or surrounding counties in the following ways: 25% of developmental math students self-identified in a category that Deil-Amen (2011) would likely have referred to as part of "a diverse and multicultural student body" (p. 5), and 46% of developmental English and reading students self-identified as a part of this group (Mountain Community College, 2017). These students are part of the *other half* of higher education that fundamentally disrupts the norms associated with "traditional" or "non-traditional" and continues to grow; in fact, these students *are* the new norm. They are the essence of Herring's 1964 declaration (Quinterno, 2008): they *should* benefit from open access, best practices, experience, reflection, and intentions, and they deserve our time, attention, and support. However, as Boylan and Bonham (2014) notably observed, "Most policies affecting higher education are made at the state level. Legislators and state higher education executive offices generally do not consult practitioners" (p. 251), and, as a result, "state higher education policy flows downhill (p.

251). How exciting is it to consider that the counter-work we are currently doing can contribute to the future, despite resistance, a multitude of mandatory obligations, or policies foisted on us by cost-conscious politicians? As Freire understood so perfectly, “the educator is the students’ partner as they engage together in critical thinking and a quest for mutual humanization” (as cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 153). *Despite long odds, great potential exists for those who need it most.*

Speaking of potential, the National Association of Developmental Education recently expanded the definition of developmental education by emphasizing that it is about “reclaiming our knowledge and power as educators. It is speaking professionally using all we know about education to create better solutions for all students” (NADE, 2016, “Definition”). The biggest gap in current literature around developmental education exists because developmental faculty have remained silent for far too long, when in fact they have the capability to create change on their campuses by simply taking what they expertly do *on a daily basis* in their developmental education classrooms. What would happen, for instance, if each team of developmental educators formed their own campus community and invited others to join in? Consider the alternative: given the turbulent political times we find ourselves currently immersed in, it is all too easy to see just how damaging myth-perceptions or systemic implementation of ideology can be. In fact, as Mannheim (1936) observed over 80 years ago, “Antiquated and inapplicable norms, modes of thought, and theories are likely to degenerate into ideologies whose function it is to conceal...rather than reveal” (p. 85). These words are just as true today. Myth-perceptions can cause irreparable harm, *especially* when priorities, such as misguided notions of power, are prized. Doesn’t the potential for improvement both locally and nationally supersede silence? The time is right to speak up and

show what we know. This shift does not take us very far outside our comfort zones or current classroom practice, but it does give us the ability to disrupt detachment between policy and practice, to advocate for our students and ourselves, and to discover with others on our campuses how very much we have in common.

Perhaps part of the reason why we may have remained quiet for so long is because we weren't even aware that what we were doing was that different or remarkable. For example, in preparing the design for the professional development sessions that were an integral part of this research, I created lesson plans like I do for any other class I have ever taught. What I didn't realize initially, however, was just how much those preliminary plans mimicked the best practices promoted within the field of developmental education. I was just doing what I always did, but in looking back over the sessions, they clearly included an emphasis on active learning and building trust, the construction of a learning community, a variety of instructional methods to reach different learning styles (and learning temperaments), a focus on engagement, a mix of collaborative and small-group work, and the use of theory to inform instruction, all of which are components of teaching in a developmental education classroom (Boylan, 2002; Boylan et al., 1999; Boylan, Bonham, & Tafari, 2005; Pruett & Absher, 2015). One of the community members noted in the "Exit Ticket" for Session 4: "One of the things I tend to do is to dismiss the things I do as 'just the things I do.'" This observation resonated with me. (Thankfully, part of what the doctoral journey gave me were the theories and explanations to support and stand behind "the things I do" on a daily basis in the classroom.) What I've also come to realize over the course of this research, which coincided with my first six months as chair of a department, is that a focus on development and growth (the stems from the psychology behind developmental education) supports *everyone*. It flips

the perspective from punishment to potential, and fosters a safe and supportive atmosphere where real change can happen. It makes it possible to attempt something new that may or may not work (while valorizing the effort). It emboldens educators to speak up and assume larger roles within their campus community. As NADE's revised definition reinforces, there is a *big* reason why developmental educators should be speaking up about the best practices and teaching philosophies they hold to be true: they work. And more than that, fellow educators across the nation are in desperate need of best practices and approaches to teaching that will help them in the classroom; they want to know how to successfully navigate the topsy-turviness that is higher education in our ever-evolving 21st century (encumbered by all that extra “stuff” that takes us away from teaching, too). In fact, even beyond the classroom a developmental philosophy can have an impact. Kegan, Lahey, Miller, Fleming, & Helsing (2016) recently published a book entitled *An Everyone Culture* which lays out a plan for becoming a “deliberately developmental organization” that “nourish[es] a culture that puts business and individual development—and the way each supports the other—front and center for everyone, every day (p. 4). A developmental philosophy benefits everyone.

Recommendations

Apropos of that six-word mission statement I wrote during a doctoral class, “CC students are my life’s work,” I worry about the students who are currently caught in the divide between developmental and curriculum coursework. Looking back at the fall semester, a significant portion of students took advantage of the Multiple Measures placement only to find themselves failing their very first curriculum class(es): *what happens to them now?* Do they retake the courses, and if so, does anything change for them the second time around? Do they take a step over to developmental education that ultimately

propels them forward? Do they simply drop out of school? More work needs to be done, on the ground, of course, and not necessarily within the legislature, as this policy takes hold.

Speaking up is sometimes hard to do, but I have found that pluck, tenacity, and, yes, optimism, can go a long way when there is work (or a dissertation) to be done. Therefore, I echo the call for educators in the field of developmental education to speak up and show what they know. Let's take our seats at the table. I tell you what—I'll go first. The other gift I received from the doctoral journey was the belief that anyone within an educational environment can be a leader: don't ever think that you can't make a difference because you're "only" an adjunct, a 9-month employee, or just one person. The truth is that you're never alone, even if you haven't found your community yet. Collectively, we do wonderful work within the field of developmental education, and we shouldn't be keeping it a secret when our expertise could benefit all students or improve our campuses. If you want, you could always START with a gentle approach: simply gather together with a few of your colleagues, work through a couple of reflective questions (Appendix A features several), see what conversation bubbles up, actively listen and engage each other, and let me know how it goes.

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Appendix A: Session Design

Session 1: Reflective Poetic Inquiry: *examining what we do*

Session 2: Reflective Disciplinary Inquiry: *analyzing curriculum and classroom practices*

Session 3: Reflective Critical Inquiry: *addressing community*

Session 4: Reflective Multiperspectival Inquiry: *ensuring that all are heard*

Session 1: Reflective Poetic Inquiry: *Why do we do what we do?*

Introduction to Reflective Inquiry: key characteristics, outcomes

Session #1: The Journey

Introductions to tablemates: why are you here? What do you want to gain from this PD?

Taking time to reflect: The first set of questions is based on Henderson and Gornik's (2007) questions regarding reflective poetic inquiry:

Charting Our Values & Beliefs

- Looking back, what is one thing you would have told yourself at the start of your career in education?
- What values and beliefs do you currently hold as an educator?
- Have these values and beliefs changed over time? Why do you think that is?
- How do your daily actions align with your values and beliefs as an educator? (How does your teaching or administrative approach reflect these beliefs?)
- Are you willing to discuss your professional values and beliefs? Why/why not?

(Henderson and Gornik, 2007, p. 73)

Taking time to discuss: find someone to talk to who holds a different role here at the college (if possible) and chat about your responses

Whiteboard activity: Calculating our combined experience: how many years of paid teaching experience do you have?

Group discussion: Is teaching a calling?

Taking time to reflect: goal-setting

Grounding Our Journey

- Step #1: Identify two to three examples where you have experienced success as an educator in recent years. *Is there a common theme—or themes—to these examples?*
- Step #2: Identify two to three challenges you have experienced as an educator in recent years. *Is there a common theme—or themes—to these examples?*
- Step #3. Identify 1 short-term goal (< 2 years) and 1 long-term goal (> 2 years) as it relates to your role as an educator.
- Step #4: Based on the first three steps and in keeping with your values and beliefs, describe your purpose for working here (similarly, you could think of this as your personal mission statement).

Exit Ticket: Turn your personal mission statement into a 6-word memoir

Session 2: Reflective Disciplinary Inquiry: *analyzing curriculum and classroom practices*

Warm-up Activity: Play the What If? game

Recap of Session #1/Context for Session #2

Taking time to reflect: These questions are based on Henderson and Gornik's (2007) questions regarding reflective disciplinary inquiry:

Digging Deeper

- What needs to my students have enhanced understanding of the subject matter?
- What needs do I have for enhanced understanding of my subject matter?
- How do I select and evaluate the educational materials/activities I use for instruction?

- How are the educational materials/activities I use representative of the student diversity in the classroom?
- How can/do we encourage students to dig deeper? (Henderson and Gornik, 2007, p. 71)

To share with the group:

- What's worked recently in the classroom?
- What hasn't worked or isn't working?
- What are you interested in trying?

Taking time to discuss: Discuss responses to the last 3 questions from “Digging Deeper” in pairs

Group discussion: Helping students deepen their subject matter understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, as cited in Henderson & Gornik, 2007)

Exit Ticket: What would happen if I... (complete sentence stem)

Session 3: Reflective Critical Inquiry: *addressing community*

Warm-up Activity: Examining Community (whiteboard activities)/ Whip It! self-assessment

Recap of Session #2/Context for Session #3

Taking time to reflect: These questions are based primarily on Henderson and Gornik's (2007) questions regarding reflective critical inquiry:

Examining Curriculum in Relation to Community

- How does your actual teaching vary from the written curriculum (the syllabus, or SLOs, for instance?) (Henderson and Gornik, 2007, p. 75)
- **Hidden Curriculum vs. Actual Curriculum:** According to educationreform.org, “the hidden curriculum consists of the unspoken or implicit academic, social, and

cultural messages that are communicated to students while they are in school”

(Hidden Curriculum, 2014).

- What are the unspoken rules about being in an *academic* setting that we might expect students to know?
- What are the unspoken rules about being in a *social* setting that we might expect students to know?
- What are the unspoken rules about being in a *cultural* setting that we might expect students to know?
- What happens when students don’t honor these rules?
- **Making the Curriculum Explicit:** *(you’ll share this response with the group)*
 - How can we foster awareness of and inclusion of the hidden curriculum for students *(how do we help students who don’t know the rules, or intentionally or unintentionally break the rules)?*
 - How do we ensure that the *classroom* is a place where people can grow together?
 - How do we ensure that this *college* is a place where people can grow together? (Henderson and Gornik, 2007, p. 75)
- **Call to action:** Think back to your goals from session #1: is there anything you’re *not* doing that needs to be done? Are there actions we can take collectively?
(Henderson and Gornik, 2007, p. 75)

Taking time to discuss: Discuss responses to the last 3 questions from “Digging Deeper” in pairs

Group discussion: Explicit vs. hidden curriculum, other questions as led

Closing activity: Whip It! verbal course check-in: Is this working? Is it productive?

Session 4: Reflective Multiperspectve Inquiry: *ensuring that all are heard*

Warm-up Activity: demonstrate multiperspectve inquiry (i.e. Japanese “Cube” Test or other subjective assessment)

Brief recap of past 3 sessions/Context for Session #4

Taking time to reflect: These questions is based on Henderson and Gornik’s (2007) questions regarding reflective disciplinary inquiry:

Reflective Multiperspectve Inquiry

In my community or on my campus...

- How do I explore/see things through the eyes of other cultures, races, genders, ages, and social-economic classes?

In the classroom...

- How am I sensitive to everyone’s voice?
- How can I reduce the nervousness or anxiety students feel related to expressing their voice?
- During small or large group activities, what evidence is apparent that 1) people are listening and 2) everyone had an opportunity to share/ participate?
- Is there anyone who is excluded? How do I encourage students who tend to exclude themselves?
- How do I accommodate diverse learning styles?

In my life...

- Do I explore problems from a variety of perspectives?
- Do I present or accept more than one solution? Why/why not?
- Do I support and accept solutions offered by others? Why/why not? (Henderson and Gornik, 2007, p. 76)

Henderson and Gornik (2007) wrote: Reflective multiperspective inquiry invites educators “to become comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty in the classroom” (p. 76). What does this mean?

Taking time to discuss: Applying Reflective Inquiry (whiteboard activity)

Group discussion: based on whiteboard activity

Exit Ticket: Initial Takeaways from the Course

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Email Recruitment Example

Dear Faculty,

You're invited to participate in a series of PD sessions from October - December involving reflective inquiry.

What will we do?

- look at the reasons *why* we teach
- address current issues in the classroom
- brainstorm solutions
- share best practices to better serve students

What is reflective inquiry?

- *a process of reflection that leads to deeper self-understanding and student understanding*
- *a problem-solving cycle that addresses curriculum choices, subject matter, and current challenges*
- *an opportunity to inform the decisions we make in the classroom on a daily basis*
- *a series of professional development sessions that involves collaborative learning, critical thinking, and creative problem solving*

When and where?

- A series of 4 sessions: Oct. 7, Oct. 28, Nov. 18, Dec. 2
- Fridays @ 10AM

Earn PD credit! Register for this series of sessions and earn 6 hours of professional development credit.

Facilitator: Joanna Bolick

The Fine Print:

Participants are strongly urged to take part in all sessions. In addition to being beneficial to you, these professional development sessions will inform Joanna Bolick's dissertation research. This research has been jointly approved by MCC and Appalachian State University. All participants will be asked to sign an informed consent prior to participating. *Identities of participants and college will be kept confidential. This research is based on the community we form and the actions we take, not on the individual.*

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

Information to Consider About this Research

Dear Participant,

I, Joanna Bolick, (“researcher”) am working on dissertation research through my studies at Appalachian State University. This research revolves around a series of professional development sessions offered at a community college in North Carolina. The purpose of the research is to create a community of interaction using reflective inquiry in order to share and shape instructor perceptions and challenges regarding first semester students (as well as all community college students) and to identify best practices related to instruction of these individuals.

Procedures

As part of this project, **I would like to conduct a series of four professional development sessions with you during the Fall 2016 academic semester.** These professional development sessions will last approximately 1.5 hours each, for a total of 6 hours. Sessions will include audio recording for documentation if it is deemed to be unobtrusive to the natural environment and flow of the classes by the instructor and researcher.

Risks & Benefits

Every precaution will be taken to ensure that the risks involved in this study are minimal to you, including confidentiality and the option to not answer any questions that you might find uncomfortable. The benefits are minimal to you as well, although you are invited to enroll in these professional development sessions through our professional development management system in order to earn professional development credit.

Anonymity & Confidentiality

Below you have the option to select a pseudonym. Participants will not be identified by name and pseudonyms will be provided if you waive the option to designate your own pseudonym. Responses will be guarded so that personally identifying information is not included in any research reports. I, Joanna Bolick, will have sole access to the raw data from these professional development sessions. Results of this research will be used for a dissertation in pursuit of a Doctorate of Education degree. Your consent indicates confirmation of your understanding that results and research may also be published.

Compensation

You will not receive payment for this research project, but you do have the option of enrolling in the sessions to receive professional development credit through Learner Web.

Freedom to Withdraw

All participation in this research is voluntary. At any time during this research, you may choose not to participate or answer any questions without consequences. You have the right to withdraw, at any time, for any reason, without consequences. You also have permission to review all quotations included in the dissertation upon request.

Exempt Research

Appalachian State University's Institutional Review Board has determined this study to be exempt from IRB oversight. Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to the IRB Administrator, Research Protections, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608 (828) 262-2692, irb@appstate.edu.

Participant's Responsibilities

Your responsibilities are as follows: to participate in four professional development sessions throughout the Fall 2016 semester and comment, if desired, within a forum in our learning management system designed to supplement session discussions.

If you agree to these terms and will participate in this study, please sign the consent form below.

Thanks very much for your consideration!

Joanna Bolick

Participant Agreement

___ I understand that I am being asked to participate in a series of four professional development sessions that will take place during the Fall 2016 semester.

___ I understand that my name and identifying characteristics will **not** be used in connection with the four professional development sessions. In the place of my name, I request the following pseudonym: _____.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have read the *Consent to Participate in Research*, had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and received satisfactory answers, and want to participate. I understand I can keep a copy for my records.

Participant's Name (PRINT)

Participant's Signature

Date

Contact information:

Joanna Bolick, primary investigator: Bolickjb1@appstate.edu; (828) 713-4150

Dr. Krista Terry, faculty advisor: terrykp@appstate.edu

Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to the IRB Administrator, Research Protections, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608 (828) 262-2692, irb@appstate.edu.

Appendix D: Observation Guide
Observation Table *(to be completed for each session)*

Topic	Observations
Nonverbal communication	<p>What does non-verbal communication indicate at the beginning of the session?</p> <p>What does non-verbal communication indicate at the end of the session? (What does body posture/language indicate?)</p> <p>Does the participants' level of receptivity change during the class?</p>
Interactions	<p>How do participants interact with each other? What is the relationship among participants?</p>
Evidence of Dialogue	
Evidence of Collaboration	
What activities high response from participants?	
What activities evoked minimal response from participants?	
Seating arrangements	(complete on back)

Appendix E: Post- and Pre-Session Survey Questions

After Session 1

What did you enjoy about session #1?
What could be improved (or what would you like more of) in session #2?
What questions do you have related to Reflective Inquiry?
What have you found yourself reflecting on this week?

Prior to Session 2

What expectations do you have for students entering our college classrooms for the first time?
How do you assess the knowledge they gain in your course(s)?
What do you expect students to be able to do as a result of their studies here?
What have you found yourself reflecting on this week?

Prior to Session 3

How do you establish a sense of community in your classes?
What impact do the values of the community at large have on your classes? the college as a whole?
What have you been reflecting on this week?
What questions should we be sure to address in an upcoming session?

After Session 4: Assessing the Series as a Whole

What have you found yourself reflecting on this week?
Was reflecting within this community different than the way(s) you've reflected in the past? How so?
Has our shared collaboration through the Reflective Inquiry sessions over the past 8 weeks influenced you? How so?
What best practices or ideas emerged from the sessions?
How might these best practices or ideas shape the ways you work with first semester students?
It was suggested after the last session that we form a PLC (professional learning community) in order to continue our collaboration. Would you be interested in participating in a Reflective Inquiry PLC during the spring semester?
Were course outcomes met?
What worked well in these sessions?
What suggestions do you have for improvement?
What did you value most about this PD experience?

Vita

Joanna B. Bolick graduated from the University of Minnesota, Morris with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Speech Communication in May of 1998. In October 1998, she moved to Asheville, North Carolina to pursue opportunities in the publishing field. In 2012, she began study toward a Master of Library Science at Appalachian State University. The M.L.S. was awarded in 2014. Joanna then commenced work toward an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University, completing this degree in May 2017. She resides in western North Carolina with her husband and two children.

Joanna is passionate about the field of developmental education, and currently serves as chair of the Developmental Studies department at a community college in western North Carolina. She was named the Adjunct Teacher of the Year for the 2014-2015 school year. In 2015, she was the recipient of the Ray Moore Award from the NC Library Association for the article, “Addressing Language Barriers Through Readers’ Advisory: Librarian, Literature, and Locality” which appeared in *North Carolina Libraries Journal*. She was named a 2016 NISOD Excellence Award winner, and in early 2017 her article, “Teaching in a Topsy-Turvy Classroom” was published in NISOD’s *Innovation Abstracts*. She has attended both the Kellogg Institute and Advanced Kellogg Institute through the National Center for Developmental Education at Appalachian State University and completed the NCDE Developmental Education Specialist Certification. Her primary goal is to reframe the conversation around Developmental Education so that others understand just how important it is to maintain a developmental perspective in work and in life.